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“WHY DON’T YOU PLAY DOUBLES?”

Jane Stuart's Chum

BY

Grace May Remick

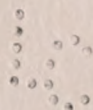
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Jane Stuart—Twin, The Glenloch Girls Series, etc.

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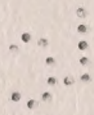
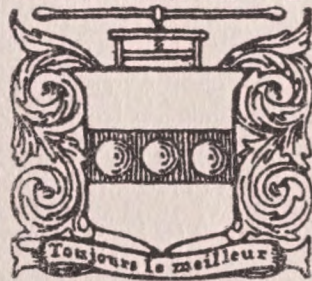


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Introduction

"JANE STUART, TWIN," the first book of this series, begins just when Jane and her family have to learn by experience that money sometimes takes unto itself wings and flies away. In this case the loss of it meant that the Stuarts had to leave the home where they had always lived, and accept the offer of a rent-free house in a little seashore town which Jane was sure she should not like. Having made up her mind to this, she promptly changed it and began, almost at once, to enjoy Belhaven, and the girls and boys who came to make her acquaintance.

Learning for the first time that Aunt Caroline, in whose house they were living, had lost a son by death, and had never been able to find his child, Jane constituted herself a detective, and tried her best to discover "little Caroline," as Aunt Caroline fondly called her grandchild. Naturally, this was something of an undertaking, and did not end quite as she expected.

There are good times and bad times in the story, mistakes and disappointments, surprises and accidents. And through it all Jane goes on making

Introduction

friends, thinking her own family the nicest in the world, and warmly admiring her twin, David.

In "Jane Stuart's Chum" we meet again the characters of the first book, and Jane makes some new friends.

The next book will be the story of a camping experience.

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Jane Stuart's Chum

Jane Stuart's Chum

CHAPTER I

AUNT JANE'S RECIPE

JANE was in the midst of an entrancing dream when something suddenly landed on the bed and woke her at the most exciting moment. It seemed ages before she could really be sure that it was only Judy's cat, fiercely humped, and glaring at Kenneth's dog, who wanted to jump, but did not dare.

"You wretched beasts!" Jane scolded, as soon as her sleepy gray eyes took in the situation. "What do you mean, Fluffy Stuart, by rushing into my room at this hour of the night, and spoiling a perfectly good dream? Now I shall never know—— My goodness gracious! It isn't night! It's morning—it's ——" she was wide awake now, and staring anxiously at the little clock on her desk. "Horrors! It's quarter past seven, and I can hear Susan Trot setting the table."

Even in the midst of a wild scramble to get dressed Jane was conscious that this October

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Saturday morning was a wonderful combination of warm sunshine and exhilarating breeze, made perfect by a sky of dazzling blue.

"Oh," she murmured, sniffing rapturously at the sweet air which had poured into her room all night. "Saturday, and weather like this! It makes me feel that I ought to do something special to celebrate. What would you do, Ragsy?"

Rags, turning disappointed eyes from Fluff, who had curled herself into a fat pincushion with insulting indifference, gave a short, sharp bark that was perfectly understandable.

"Oh, you would, would you?" laughed Jane, beginning on her long fair hair with quick fingers. "You'd chase soft, furry things up tall trees if you could, wouldn't you, and scare the life out of Ken's chickens? And after you'd done all the mischief possible you'd look like an innocent lamb. 'I know your tricks and your manners.'"

Jane was fond of quoting the "Dolls' Dress-maker," and it set her to thinking of the book which mother was reading to her and her twin brother David. Then the beauty of the day asserted itself once more, and the feeling came that something a little unusual ought to be done to celebrate the glorious weather, her own light-heartedness and the general health and happiness of the entire family of Stuart.

Aunt Jane's Recipe

"I don't mean anything very big," she assured herself, as she turned down the bed and put the pillows over by the window, "because this afternoon there'll be tennis with the girls at Polly's. But just something a little different from what I do every Saturday morning. I'll get suggestions from the family.

"What would you do if you were I?" she asked David, as they made the customary dash for first right to the stairs on their way down to breakfast.

"Oh, I don't know." David's answer usually came slowly. "Try doing my hair two or three new ways, I guess, or change around all the furniture in my room."

"Foolish! I mean something sensible and new."

"Well, it would be new if 'twas sensible, wouldn't it?" and David ducked to escape swift punishment, and fled into the dining-room with his sister in close pursuit.

"What's this? An invasion by wild Indians?" demanded mother, trying to look severe, but really only smiling at her tall, fourteen-year-old twins.

"Excuse us, mumsey. What Spinksy said was so—so sudden, and really quite bright for him," said Jane, dropping into her chair and shaking a threatening fist at her brother. "I really shall

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have to punish him later. It doesn't do to let these things go with children."

Kenneth, who up to that moment had been deeply absorbed in consuming his cereal, gurgled joyously. He could almost always be depended upon to laugh at Jane's small jokes.

"Well, if Davy's a child you are," observed Judy, who was of a more literal turn of mind than her younger brother. "Really, I think Ken's the only child in this house. I'm twelve, you know."

"Twelve and two days," reminded David solemnly. "Don't forget that part, Judy. If you get mixed in your reckoning now, you'll never be able to say that you're twelve years and three hundred and fifty-five days, or anything of that kind."

"Anyway, I shall be ten next month." Kenneth offered this information more to reassure himself after the affront of being called a child than for anything else.

Susan Trot, waiting on table, was quick to feel a little lack of buoyancy in his tone. "I ain't callin' anybody that can run a hen business exactly a child," she murmured in a voice intended only for Kenneth's ear, and then at the quick brightening of his face went on her way to the kitchen.

"Mother, can you think of anything new for me to do this morning?" Jane was still searching for an answer to her question.

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"Why don't you ——?" began mother.

"Help me with my egg business."

"Paint those paper dolls for me you promised so long ago."

Kenneth and Judy interrupted almost at the same instant and then looked apologetically at their mother.

"'Scuse me, little mother. You see when a fellow's so busy as I am he kind of forgets his politeness."

"Oh, Ken, not that excuse," his mother protested quickly. "You're never going to be too busy to be polite to your mother or any one else. I accept your apology, of course. And—and Judy's?" She ended with a questioning glance at her younger daughter, who, though always hating to acknowledge herself in the wrong, murmured meekly that she was just going to apologize.

"What were you thinking of, mother?" queried Jane, skilfully bringing the conversation back to her own affairs.

"I was wondering why you don't try that recipe for cake that you found in your Aunt Jane's little diary."

Jane looked sober for an instant. At first thought the idea of doing anything in the kitchen on such an out-of-doors day didn't appeal to her. Then her face brightened. "If it is nice it could be my

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cooking specialty, couldn't it, mumsey? Almost all the Belhaven girls I know have a cooking or a sewing specialty, and I've been meaning to have one. I should be so prideful if the church supper ladies would only say to me as they do to Serena Holt, 'Now, Serena, won't you make some of your delicious marshmallow cakes for next Wednesday evening?' "

"Well, they wouldn't say 'Serena' to you, and yours won't be marshmallow cakes," remarked Judy crushingly.

"Julia Stuart, you haven't the least scrap of imagination, not the least. Anyway, mother, that's the very thing. You always hit the nail on the head." Jane folded her napkin, and went around the table to give her mother a hug. Which movement on her part was the signal for an affectionate onslaught of young Stuarts, from which their pretty mother emerged rosy and disheveled.

"I wish you'd stand up, mother, so's there'd be more of you," grumbled Kenneth, not quite satisfied with his share. "I don't want to crawl under the table and hug your slippers when I'm so chockful of breakfast, and those great strong twins don't leave me any room."

Mother laughed and hugged the curly brown head tenderly. Then she took Judy into her embrace, and somehow, the next moment, there

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was again a bouquet of Stuarts, as David had once poetically called it.

"Well, now that does look as ef you set an awful store by each other," said a cracked voice so unexpectedly near that every one turned toward the door leading into the kitchen to see Mr. Chope with his smiling eyes shut almost tight, and a letter in his hand. "Sally, she suspicioned there was a letter for Mis' Stuart in the post-office," he continued, "an' she insisted on haulin' me over to git it. You'd oughter seen her lay back her ears and laugh when I come out of the office with it. Dju ever see a hoss laugh, son?" As he finished speaking, Mr. Chope's arm went around the shoulders of Kenneth, who was always his loyal comrade.

"Thank you, Mr. Chope. That was a good thought of Sally's. She's by far the most remarkable horse I'm acquainted with," said Mrs. Stuart, taking the letter. Then Mr. Chope went back through the kitchen, and they could hear him chuckle in response to one of Susan Trot's sharp remarks.

"It's from Aunt Caroline," murmured Mrs. Stuart, opening the letter and glancing through it rapidly. "She's planning another long journey, but can't decide because Donald's so unhappy every time it's mentioned."

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"Poor old Don," David said sympathetically. "I bet he's dead tired of chasing around all the time. In the very last letter I had from him he said he wished he could go to school with Jane and me."

"She and Uncle Stephen and Donald will be here before long, but she doesn't say just when," continued mother, putting the letter into its envelope again. "Now scatter, children, and do your morning work. Jane, if you need any help from me let me know. No doubt Susan will be glad to advise you. Only by all means, dear, depend on yourself all you can, and clear away any disorder you make."

"Ma mère, I shall obey your slightest command," responded Jane with a grand air. She had been studying French for the last four weeks, and loved to throw in a word or two when she could.

"David, what are your plans?" pursued mother, still keeping a tight hold on Kenneth who had reached the wriggling stage.

"Why, the fellows are going to try to finish Uncle Stephen's little house this morning," David answered with one eye on his brother.

Kenneth's face fell. He was firmly convinced that the log cabin which Uncle Stephen had encouraged the boys to build on his camping-ground could not be finished without him. "Aw, say,

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that's mean," he protested warmly. "Mother, do I have to stay at home and clean my hen-house? I want to be with the boys."

"Those big boys probably don't want you," observed Judy, whose consoling remarks were apt to be of doubtful value.

"Well, I want to go all the same," began Kenneth, and then stopped to listen to what his mother was saying.

"You know best, son, whether you can put off that hen-house work until another Saturday." Mrs. Stuart was gazing searchingly into the brown eyes so like her own. "What does Mr. Chope say about it?"

Kenneth had to laugh, though he realized that this question meant his own defeat. "Mr. Chope says," he began with that irrepressible chuckle which always amused his family, "he says that if I don't clean the house to-day the hens are going to strike. He's been hearing them talk about it all the week."

"Then don't neglect it," counseled mother with a laugh. "I dare say the boys won't finish the house to-day even though they think they will. David, I have some errands for you to do before you go with the boys. And now we're really off, I think."

For the next hour, Jane, still under the in-

Jane Stuart's Chum

fluence of blue sky and October sunshine, whistled gaily all through her making of beds, and putting rooms in order, with her mind a perfect medley of cheerful ideas.

Then before going down-stairs she sat down at her desk and copied the recipe. She could not risk taking Aunt Jane's dear little old diary into the kitchen where she might soil it in the course of her cooking.

"This recipe is delicious made in the form of cup cakes," the prim delicate writing said. "My father ate three of them and praised me very much."

"Well, if I make 'em even ordinarily good it won't take much urging to get Davy and Ken to eat three apiece any old time," observed Jane thoughtfully, as she compared her own dashing handwriting with that of the earlier Jane.

"Mine's more stylish nowadays, and anyway I can usually read it," she comforted herself. "I s'pose, though, I ought to try to make it plainer. Uncle Stephen thinks he should really enjoy my letters if he could tell what they're about."

When Jane's fair head was poked around the kitchen door Susan Trot looked up from her work with her usual pleased, eager expression. She was sitting at a small table polishing silver with an energy that seemed to say, "Let no guilty spoon escape."

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"Coast clear, Susan, and is there a good baking fire?" asked Jane, putting on as wise an air as she could, and laughing in the midst of it.

"The kitchen is yours," Susan's comprehensive sweep of the hand made it seem like a palace, "and the fire's splendid. I was just crazy to get out all the things for you, but your ma told me no."

"That's right. I want to do it all myself." Jane wore a heroically helpless expression which would have softened any heart. "I don't seem to know just where to begin, though."

"Read over your directions out loud," advised Miss Trot, suggesting by her capable, energetic manner the grown-up title Mr. Chope had given her, and the Stuart family had borrowed. "That might give you a start."

"'Yolks of five eggs,'" read Jane obediently. "Mercy! It's lucky we have hens. 'Two cups of sugar.' What an awful lot to spoil if it doesn't come out right. 'Juice and rind of one orange.' Susan, have we any oranges in the house? We have? Oh, I'm so relieved. 'One-half cup of cold water.' Luckily that's cheap. 'Two cups of flour. Two level teaspoonfuls of baking-powder. Whites of three eggs. Mix in the order named.'"

Jane pondered for a moment as she finished reading. "I believe first I'll get the orange ready,

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and the sugar and flour measured, and then I can go ahead with the eggs and the mixing."

"Good for you," approved Susan. "That's jest what I should do if I was goin' to make that cake. Only, before I begun to mix, I should see that my pans were warmed a little on the back of the stove, and properly buttered."

"Oh, of course. You've saved my life, Susan, though I hope I should have thought of it before I got really into the middle of things. Now I'm off, as mother says."

For a while Jane worked with such absorption that she quite forgot to talk, which on her part was a symptom of great stress of mind. Then with an orange grated and squeezed, gem-pans buttered, baking-powder stirred into sifted flour, and that and the sugar measured into separate bowls, she drew a long breath of relief.

"It's great fun. I like it," she announced, as she began to break the yolks of the eggs into a large, yellow mixing-bowl.

"Cookin' ain't so bad if you only take it right," Miss Trot remarked philosophically. She was holding up a tablespoon as she talked, and regarding its brilliancy with a merciless eye for flaws. "Now I think it's real pretty to see some things go together."

"Why, so do I," cried Jane, who was just stir-

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ring the sugar into the beaten yolks, and admiring the combination of white and soft yellow.

"I think toast is handsome when it's browned jest right, and puddings with a little patch of jelly and whipped cream on top."

"And your cunning little biscuits, and pretty green salads, and that nice fish hash you make with beets and carrots in it," pursued Jane, quite charmed with the subject. "I believe I'll learn how to cook a lot of things, Susan. Will you teach me?"

"Sure I will." Miss Trot's eyes were shining at Jane's praise of her cooking. "I'd be glad to."

"You know a great deal about cooking and housework, don't you, and you're not quite three years older than I am," said Jane as she carefully measured the half-cup of water and stirred it in.

To her surprise Susan's face flushed violently, and the keen dark eyes grew misty. "I'd be willin' to work like—like a tiger if I could only learn some of the things you know, though," she said after a moment in a choked voice.

"Why, what do you mean?" Jane's busy spoon paused for an instant and then resumed its work mechanically.

"Oh, readin' and 'rithmetic and spellin', and most of all how to talk right." Miss Trot's words hurried out as though the desire for these accom-

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plishments had been long pent up in her mind. "There's somethin' I want to learn to be, but I can't even begin till I know a lot more'n I do now."

"What is it, Susan?" Jane was always frankly interested in the affairs and desires of other folks.

But Susan, apparently already repenting her avowal, had grown suddenly shy, and could not be prevailed upon to disclose her secret hopes. To all Jane's coaxing she shook her head in mute refusal, and put her whole attention on finishing and putting away the shining silver.

"There!" murmured Jane at last, breathing a sigh of satisfaction as she softly closed the oven door. "Now, while I'm waiting for it to bake, I'll clear away the muss I've made."

"I'd like awful well to do that for you." Susan seized a broom and started toward the kitchen door as though fearful that she might take a hand in the clearing-up process if she lingered.

"I couldn't possibly let you," answered Jane, getting out the dish-pan with a capable air which she felt sure must be impressive. "Mother said I was to do it myself, and, besides, you won't tell me your secret."

"I'd—I'd like to, but—oh, well, I can't now, anyway," Susan stammered. "I've got to sweep." She was at the door by this time and then in the

Aunt Jane's Recipe

hall. Jane, fearing to make her cake fall if she walked heavily, tiptoed across the room and called to her.

"Oh, Susan, if you'd only drift in about twenty minutes or half an hour from now," she begged. "I want you to help me decide when it's done."

"All right. I'll be there," and Miss Trot's head peered over the baluster to nod an emphatic acceptance of the appointment.

Back in the kitchen again Jane took one swift peep at her cakes when ten minutes were up. Then she began to wash the cooking-dishes. Suddenly she stopped short. "How stupid of me!" she said aloud. "Why didn't I tell Susan that I'd teach her all I know, which isn't much, but it's something. She was so pleased, too, when I asked her to help me about cooking. I'll make up for it the minute she comes down."

But in spite of her virtuous resolve, when Susan came just in time to confirm the new cook's opinion, and was off again quickly to finish her sweeping, everything faded from Jane's mind but her delight in the delicious golden-brown cakes which she and the fire had created.

"My, but they smell good!" she exclaimed, gloating over them, and proceeding to pry one out delicately with a fork. She wished David were there to be proud of her. For some reason tri-

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umphs never seemed complete without her other half to share them. "Two dozen beauties and this cunning loaf," she murmured with a rapturous gleam in her eye, and then Mr. Chope's voice, speaking just outside the window, roused her from the satisfied contemplation of her achievement.

"Now, Lady Jane, you don't mean ter tell me that you made them beauteous cakes," he was saying with a flattering air of overwhelming surprise when Jane looked up. "Why, I couldn't of even dreamed anythin' that looked so good as those."

"Try one," said Jane proudly, passing the plate to him as she spoke. All the Stuart children regarded Mr. Chope, who had worked about the place since their mother was a little girl, as a personal friend to be consulted and deferred to.

The old man nibbled, then tasted judicially, as though something portentous hung upon his decision.

"Soo-perb," he said at last, and then again as though the word pleased his ear, "soo-perb. Light's a feather, and jest enough flavorin' and sweet. I bet that food of the gods Kenneth reads to me about, that ambrosy, ain't any better'n these. You must have made 'em hundreds of times to have 'em so perfect."

At Jane's delighted admission that this was the

Aunt Jane's Recipe

very first attempt, Mr. Chope was so astounded that he swallowed a morsel of cake unexpectedly, and went off into a fit of coughing that threatened to finish him.

"Here, drink some of this," said Jane, flying over to the window with a mug of water. And then, when Mr. Chope was somewhat better, she added, "Have you been over to the little house this morning?"

He nodded an assent, not trusting himself to speak, and his face wrinkled into one of the expansive smiles so characteristic of him. "Them boys are all working like beavers," he wheezed, "becuz David's told 'em Mr. Stephen Eliot's goin' to light in on 'em soon, and they're afraid he'll be disapp'inted."

"The other fellers brought lunches so's they needn't waste any time goin' home, but Davy, he didn't know they was goin' to do that, and he's feelin' kinder troubled," Mr. Chope went on suggestively. "They're all promisin' to give him things ef he'll only stay, but I can see he feels 's if he ought to do his share."

"Of course he does. I'm going to ask mother"—and Jane was half-way to the kitchen door before a sudden thought made her pause and turn back to the window. "How many boys are there, Mr. Chope?" she demanded eagerly.

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"Lemme see; there's David and Rob Randall," the old man was checking them off on his brown fingers, "and Ned Holt and Jack Dexter, and that important-feelin' Oliver boy. He's fussin' round there as if he owned the whole shootin' match, but the other chaps don't pay no more 'tention to him than as if he was one o' them little buzzin' flies. Not much like his sister, is he?"

"I should say not. Molly is a darling. Well, that's five, isn't it?" Jane had started for the door again.

"If your mother is willin' that you should take over a lunch to David and some of them prize cakes to the other boys," began Mr. Chope, neatly guessing Jane's little plan, "jest tell her that I'll go along, too, and if there's no objection I'll carry some milk."

Mother's consent could almost have been taken for granted, and she hurried down-stairs herself to help Jane put up a lunch. It became in the end a family affair, for Judy wandered in and freely volunteered advice; Kenneth appeared in overalls, with the dew of honest labor on his brow, and looked so wistfully at the lunch that Jane presented him with one of her cakes; while Miss Trot, apparently in two or three places at once, was always on hand to help, or to frown at any levity on the part of Mr. Chope.

Aunt Jane's Recipe

"There, now we're off adventuring, aren't we, Mr. Chope?" Jane said joyously as they started out of the back door.

"Yes, sir, we are. And if I meet one of them double-header smoke and fire dragons I'm goin' to bring him back to Kenneth for a pet."

"Humph!" sniffed Susan Trot, flying for the broom to sweep out some almost invisible dirt left by Mr. Chope's heavy boots. "Humph! Dragons!"

CHAPTER II

PURPLE SATIN

As they went along the invigorating breeze suggested to Mr. Chope his favorite topic of ocean adventure, and he plunged absorbedly into a long and thrilling tale. Once fairly under way he needed no response, and Jane, who had heard this particular story before, decided that it was rather like a game to try to look intelligent and interested, and to think her own thoughts at the same time.

“Not that my own thoughts wouldn’t make me look intelligent and interested,” she was saying to herself, as they came within sight of the house that belonged to the ladies who used to make bayberry candles. Jane always distinguished it in this way because Mr. Chope had told them about it the first time the Stuart family had gone to Uncle Stephen’s camping-place. Now it was rented, and the bayberry ladies had gone into the city for the winter.

Jane gazed at the old house as they approached with a certain feeling of curiosity. She had never known the people who lived in it, but for her it had held a suggestion of light and good cheer.

Purple Satin

Now, to her fancy, the atmosphere had changed, and there was something gloomy, almost forbidding about it. Two weeks before this she had seen a girl, enveloped in shawls, sitting in a steamer-chair on the piazza. She had guessed that she might be about her own age. For an instant the dark eyes looking out of the thin white face had rested on the rosy, athletic girl going by. Then the girl on the piazza had turned away her head with an air of infinite weariness.

“Now there I was,” Mr. Chope’s insistent voice suddenly penetrated the meditations of his companion, “between them two things. Now what would you have done, Lady Jane?”

Jane looked at him helplessly. “I—well, I suppose I ——” she floundered distractedly, hating to let him know that she had not been listening.

“I bet you’d have done just what I did,” said Mr. Chope firmly, and then he was off again.

Warned by this experience Jane resolved to listen, and did so for at least a minute. Then, just as they were passing the house of which she had been thinking, her attention was distracted by the sight of the girl she had seen before. This time she was evidently coming out of the door, but had stopped irresolutely on the threshold.

Jane, happily conscious still of the glory of sun and breeze, was moved by an irresistible impulse

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of friendliness. She nodded and smiled and half started to wave her hand, but the girl, gazing at her with sorrowful, almost distrustful eyes, turned quickly and fled into the house without a sign of response.

"Well, she evidently doesn't like my looks," thought Jane with a little shrug. "I shall know enough not to try that again." She was glad that Mr. Chope had not noticed the rebuff she had received, but was still talking steadily, with dreamy eyes fixed on the far distance. Jane wondered sometimes how so peaceful a man could have lived through so many thrilling adventures.

They were going across a rolling meadow now, and in a few moments had reached the brook with its log bridge. Then, almost at once, they were in the deep woods, as Jane liked to call them, and within sight of the little house which the boys had been building for Uncle Stephen.

David was the first to meet them and guessed at once the purpose for which they had come. "Well, of all lucky things! It's dandy of you and Mr. Chope to bring over my lunch. The fellows will be mighty glad of that milk. And what's this, Mrs. Janes?" He was peering inquisitively into the small basket his sister carried with such care.

"Sh!" implored Jane, seized with sudden shy-

Purple Satin

ness. "I made 'em, but don't tell any one. They're orange sponge cakes."

"Glory! They're peaches all the samee. Don't make me promise not to tell, Janesy. I can't keep it." And David took matters into his own hands, and broke the news at once to Rob Randall who had just come up.

"Say, that was awfully good of you to make those," said Rob. "Hi, fellows, come on over here. Jane has made some scrumptious cakes just for us."

"I did not," Jane explained coolly. "I made 'em for my family, and to see if I could, and I was kind enough to bring some over here. That's all."

"That's quite enough. It just shows how nice you think we all are," teased Rob, who liked to have Jane get on her dignity, and make unnecessary explanations.

"Not at all." Jane's manner was crushing. "It shows how nice I think the cakes are."

"Stop scrapping, children, and give me one." Ned Holt came hurrying up and put out a begging hand. "Why do you and Rob always quarrel, Jane? Oh, my gracious, you may cook for me any old time. Those—are—dandies."

"Let's eat a toast to Jane," proposed Jack Dexter, coming up with Stanley Oliver.

"Not before your lunch! Cake is for dessert," Jane protested.

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"Oh, pooh! We'd do more than that for you," remarked Stanley with the patronizing manner that always irritated Jane.

"Here's to the lady cookeress," said Ned, who couldn't wait any longer to prove what his eyes were telling him. "When I get home I'm going to make my sister blush for shame because she isn't so smart as you are."

"Serena!" Jane opened her gray eyes very wide. "Why, Serena knows more about cooking in one minute than I do in a day. But I'm going to learn. See if I don't." Her gaze wandered from the boys clustered around her to the little house, which on the outside, at least, seemed attractively complete. "I s'pose you couldn't be so kind and polite and—and regularly angelic as to let me look inside, could you?" she coaxed.

"Not yet," David hastened to say with brotherly firmness. He was afraid the other boys would weaken now that Jane had been so good about bringing over the cake.

"We're going to have a house-warming, you know," Rob added quickly, "and you're to be one of the lady patronesses."

"Which means, I suppose, that I shall be allowed to make the lemonade and wash the glasses," Jane responded with a laugh. "Well, all right for you, and I think you're all horrid when I've

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come way over here with these cakes. I'm not going to take the least interest in your old party. When will it be, and what kind of a one is it?"

"What indifference!" commented Jack. "We're so hurt. The date isn't set yet, but it will be some Saturday this month."

"Then you'll have a chance to see what real cooking is," Ned remarked solemnly. "Once in a while we show the girls what is ahead of them if they'll only work."

"Oh—oh," Jane groaned, putting both hands to her head. "I never heard such conceit. I'm going to eat a lunch beforehand so that I may be sure of something."

"Now will you be good, Neddy," said Rob, fanning his friend with a large oak leaf. "Stand back, boys. Give him air."

"The worst thing about the Snowshoe Club parties now," observed Stanley Oliver, "is that we have to invite too many girls."

"Why don't you leave some of us out, then? I'm sure I'll stay at home if I'm not wanted." There was something about Stanley's manner in regard to girls, an air of toleration, as though he put up with them because he must, that made Jane's wrath rise at once.

"Oh, David would be mad if we left you out," began Stanley serenely, but before he could con-

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tinue, Rob, with a quick twist of the foot and a hand in his collar, had laid him flat on the ground, and was forcibly stuffing dry leaves down his neck by way of discipline.

"You've made that brilliant remark before about 'too many girls.' Now cut it out, Stan, do you hear?" he was saying decidedly. Then, as he rose from the ground, leaving the prostrate Stanley sulkily silent, "You see, Jane," he went on, "the Snowshoe Club almost went to pieces last year because three members moved out of town, and some of the other boys went away to school, and we haven't yet found the boys we want to fill all the vacancies."

"But now we have David, and we're going to make your cousin Don a member," added Jack.

"And if the girls don't mind having so few boys we couldn't have too many girls," Ned finished with unexpected gallantry.

There was an inarticulate growl of protest from Stanley, still prone among the leaves, which Jane decided to ignore. She felt that she had been properly propitiated, and that it was no longer necessary to preserve the air of hurt dignity which she had attempted to assume.

"I'm glad you're going to have Don in the club," she said happily, "though goodness knows when he'll have any chance to be here if Aunt

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Caroline keeps him traveling all the time. I suppose your club is just a boys' club, isn't it?"

"You bet it is," stoutly affirmed the unquenchable Stanley, half rising only to be suppressed again by Ned, who rolled him over and over in the rustling leaves. Even in the midst of his anguish the slogan, "the Snowshoe Club for boys," was faintly audible, and, in spite of herself, Jane had to laugh.

"Do let him up, Ned," she begged. "He'll eat so many dry leaves that he can't appreciate my cakes. Besides, I'm awfully fond of his sister." Which last was a sly way of getting even, after all, for Stanley hated to be endured on account of his sister, and Jane knew it.

"I must go home," Jane went on suddenly. "Where's Mr. Chope?"

"Gone to the Trent farm to ask about something he thought Mrs. Trent would do for us," explained Ned. "He'll be right back."

"I can't wait and I'll run along. Are you all coming up to Polly's this afternoon?"

"If we get through here in time," promised Jack. "We'll be up for a little while, anyway."

"I'm going to see you across the brook, Mrs. Janes," said David, who always felt great responsibility in regard to his family. "Then we'll have lunch, boys."

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Rob went also, and both boys lingered to watch the girlish figure until a sharp turn took it out of their sight, and into a neighborhood where houses began.

Feeling somewhat in haste, Jane skimmed along the homeward way more quickly than she had come, but this time, also, when she approached the bayberry-candle house, she saw something which riveted her attention and made her slacken her pace. Coming from this direction, one passed first a side gate, and here some one whom Jane had not seen before was moving about in a peculiar manner.

As she drew nearer she could tell that it was a short, plump, white-haired woman dressed in glistening purple, and that she seemed to be making extraordinary efforts to turn her head so that she could see her own back. A moment later it was quite plain that her dress was held fast in the gate.

"Oh, let me help you," cried Jane, hastening to her, but it took three vigorous pushes from her strong young shoulder to make an impression on the gate, and all the time the old lady was uttering little distressful sounds which wrung the heart of her rescuer.

"Dear me! Are you dreadfully hurt?" she asked when the gate at last swung open.

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"Not the teentiest bit," declared the old lady, turning a pair of very bright blue eyes in Jane's direction. "I most wish 'twas me 'stead of my dress." She was gathering the shining purple folds into her arms as she spoke, scrutinizing them closely, and feeling of every inch as though she expected her fingers to discover what her eyes could not see.

"I don't b'lieve it's any more hurt than I am," she declared at last, with a face so full of triumph that Jane smiled a friendly response, and actually felt as though something joyful had happened to her. "Now wouldn't you have s'posed that mean old gate would have taken one bite out of it, anyway? It's just a little rubbed and dusty, but that'll come off. I declare things aren't hardly ever as bad as they seem, are they?"

She spread out the train of the gown with a little fling and gazed at it joyously. "You see I'd always planned that some time I should have a purple satin gown," she went on confidentially, "and I was jest set on havin' it hooked in the back. Of course I know it ain't the very latest thing to have 'em that way, but it makes any one look so kind of—well, so kind of young. And anyway who's goin' to be able to tell that I didn't begin on this when hooks in the back was in the height of style?"

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She looked hopefully at Jane, who, not knowing exactly what to say, smiled instead and gazed admiringly at the gown. "It's a perfectly beautiful color," she ventured, wondering meanwhile why it should be worn in the yard at this hour.

"Ain't it handsome?" The old lady fingered the lustrous folds again with tender touch. "Of course I know I hadn't ought to have it on out here at this time o' day," she said, hitting Jane's thought with an accuracy that made the latter feel almost guilty, "but somehow this morning there was something—something in the air, I guess—that jest made me feel I must celebrate some way."

"Really!" Jane's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "That was just the way I felt when I got up this morning."

"Well, I took out this dress and got the girl to hook me up—makes you feel real kind of grand lady to have some one do that for you, don't it?—and I was admirin' myself"—she broke into a soft, throaty gurgle which made Jane laugh in sympathy—"when I saw our kitten makin' for the gate as fast as she could go. Naturally I forgot myself and run out after her. She makes me an awful lot of trouble, that kitten does, but I can't help likin' the little tyke."

"Did you catch her?" inquired Jane, who felt

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herself bubbling over with mirth. It was not that she wanted to laugh at the sprightly old lady, she assured herself earnestly. But there was something so joyously expectant about the blue eyes and the humorous smile, something so confidently youthful in her manner that one longed to laugh with her.

“Oh, I shooed her into the yard. There she is now playin’ with her tail in the sunshine. Kittens get comfort out of awful silly things, don’t they? I don’t know as I blame ’em, though.” To Jane’s surprise she ended with a little sigh, and the blue eyes lost some of their brightness. “It’s done me a sight of good to talk to you and—and look at you,” she went on wistfully. “I b’lieve I’d ’most forgotten that girls could laugh and look so joyful. I’d kinder got a little acquainted with you by seeing you out of the winder. I saw you go by this mornin’ with that benevolent-lookin’ old gentleman.”

Jane stared uncomprehendingly for an instant. “Oh, you mean Mr. Chope,” she answered hastily. “Yes, he’s fine. All the Belhaven girls and boys like Mr. Chope.”

“I should know that by his face.” The old lady’s gaze wandered past Jane and along the road. “There he comes now,” she said suddenly. “I must go in. He might think it strange for me

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to be out here in the mornin' prinked up like this. Good-bye, dear. I do hope I shall manage to see you again. If only Mary would ——"

Jane strained her ears to catch the words that followed, but to no purpose. "If only Mary would what?" she was asking herself curiously when Mr. Chope overtook her, and they walked on together.

In spite of the quickness with which the old lady slipped out of sight Mr. Chope had managed to get a reasonably satisfying glimpse of her, and he was frankly inquisitive.

"Now, do tell me who she is, and who the other is that I've caught a peek at once in a while," he began with the air of one who feels that an important question is about to be settled.

"I haven't the faintest idea," responded Jane disappointingly. "But she likes your looks, Mr. Chope. She says you're a benevolent-looking gentleman."

"Sho, you don't mean it." A dull red crept slowly into Mr. Chope's brown face. "Said that, did she? Well—now. She's a mighty fine-lookin' woman, herself, with that white hair and them red cheeks. It beats all, though, how I haven't been able to find out a single word about the people in that house," he ended with some irritation in his tone.

Jane, absorbed in her own thoughts, forgot to

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answer, and they walked in unaccustomed silence until they arrived at the house.

"Well, good-bye," said Jane gaily, as her companion turned in the direction of the barn. "Thanks for helping me take over the lunch."

Mr. Chope came out of his reverie and lifted his old straw hat with impressive courtliness. "You're as welcome as the day is long. Don't you ever hesitate to ask me anythin' you want." He started off slowly, but before Jane had reached the piazza, he had turned and was coming toward her again.

"Say, Lady Jane," he began in a voice expressly calculated not to reach Susan Trot's ears should she be within hearing, "now what should you call the color of that frock that skited off all of a sudden?"

"Purple," answered Jane promptly. "Royal purple, I guess. It was satin; nice, soft, satiny satin, and made in almost the latest style."

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Chope. "You don't say so. Pupples satin! Right outdoor in the mornin', too, and not a sign of a party goin' on. I bet Juno and Cleopatra didn't do no better'n that. What's that little woman thinkin' of with all this talk goin' on 'bout the cost of high livin'?"

"Why, she said she'd always wanted a purple satin dress." Jane felt an instant desire to defend her new acquaintance from the imputation of ex-

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travagance. "You know, Mr. Chope, perhaps that's been her one biggest wish. Perhaps she's always been poor and never had a chance to have the things she wanted. Of course I don't know anything about her, but if you had talked with her you'd have sympathized about that dress, I'm sure."

"Likely I should," agreed Mr. Chope. "I'm a great one for wantin' to have people git their best wishes." He walked away again, shaking his head over life and its problems, and Jane, lingering on the piazza, heard him murmur hoarsely, "Pupple satin! Gosh all hemlock!"

CHAPTER III

AT THE GOOD-TIMES HOUSE

"My vantage," called Jane triumphantly, giving the ball a spiteful cut which sent it sliding as soon as it touched the ground. "Goodness! If I could only serve that way every time!"

"Well, even if you can't you're too much for me. That's your set." Polly Reed was flushed and breathless after the long game, and, as usual, ready to accord all credit to her opponent. "I hate a deuce game, anyway," she went on as they walked away from the court. "After it's been 'vantage in' and 'vantage out' a few thousand times I'm absolutely rattled."

Jane laughed gleefully. "Poor old Pollykins! You certainly made me work hard, and, if I do say it, not every one can do that. Who's going to use the court next?" she ended, as she and Polly approached the bench where a group of girls were sitting.

"I am," responded Molly Oliver, straightening her slim figure energetically. "Come on, Serena, or Peggy, or—oh, Esther Strong, why don't you play? You need the exercise dreadfully."

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The thin, rather stooping girl to whom she was talking looked up in alarm. "Mollyolly, darling, don't make me. I'm such a goose when I get up in front of that net. The ball looks as big as a cannon-ball."

"All the more reason why you should get used to it," responded Molly briskly, intending to go on with her customary lecture on the value of exercise, but nipped in the bud by a small auburn-haired girl with twinkling eyes.

"Sh, Molly. How do you know but that you are stepping right into the middle of some great poem?" she said impressively. "As sure as my name is Marian Chester, Essie was just wishing she had a pencil and was off by her lonesome where she could write down her beautiful thoughts. Now, 'fess up, Miss Strong."

"I was thinking that the ocean couldn't look lovelier than it does this afternoon," unwillingly admitted Esther, who never knew how to get out of answering any question her mischievous friend was pleased to ask her.

Jane, who had been putting on a sweater, dropped down on the bench beside her. "Don't let that child tease you, Essie. She's green with envy because she can't make a rhyme herself. Why don't you play doubles, girls? You and the Triad, Molly. I'm sure Serena and Peggy need exercise."

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"You may leave me out," protested Polly Reed, who was the third member of the Triad. "I'm still puffing. Oh, dear, it's horrid to be getting so fat."

The girls laughed unfeelingly at the despair in Polly's voice, and she covered both ears when they began, one after another, to suggest methods of checking her increasing plumpness.

"I don't care! I don't care!" she cried wildly. "I like candy and nuts and sweet things, and I will not walk ten miles a day, Marian Chester, nor roll on the floor till I'm dizzy. Oh me, oh my, shall I ever learn not to say anything about being fat before you girls?"

"Probably not," said Molly, looking at her with the severest expression her soft brown eyes could assume. "You moan over it all the time, and that's all the good it does. Come on, Serena. You and Marian play against Peggy and me. We really do need practice in doubles, as Jane says."

Serena Holt, tall, pink-cheeked and brown-haired, got up in haste and the small blonde girl beside her followed protestingly. Peggy Curtis was rather given to protesting, but it didn't make much difference in the end. Just now she was urging the fact that she hadn't intended to play, and that her hair which she had done a new way would all come down. Marian, whose hair curled

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naturally, laughed at her as they strolled toward the court.

"Now," said Jane when the game was fairly in progress, "now I can have all the entertainment I want. I can watch the girls or I can look at the ocean. Let's move the rug, Polly, so that we can sit on it and put our backs against the bench. Essie, your knee looks awfully good to me for a pillow."

Esther sighed contentedly when Jane's fair head rested against her. She had a boundless admiration for this friend which she was too shy to express, but which was fed on just such small attentions as this.

On pleasant Saturday afternoons these particular girls almost always met at Polly Reed's tennis court. During the winter Dr. Reed lived in the center of the town, but in early spring he moved his family to a spacious old house which had stood for years on a hill overlooking the ocean. It was a good-times house where all of Polly's friends were made welcome, and all loved to come. Indeed it was a current belief in the town that the Belhaven girls and boys thought the "Reedery," as they called it among themselves, belonged to them.

This was an afternoon of enchantment, so Jane told herself, as she sat with half-closed eyes look-

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ing out over the ocean. With all her heart she loved the color and light and sparkle that met her gaze. The sky was so blue; the fleecy clouds threw such wonderful shadows on the water, and in the distance small white-winged boats slid through the waves.

"It's great, Esther, isn't it?" Jane's voice was hardly more than a sleepy murmur, but her gray eyes were wide awake. "It makes you want to write poetry, and I'm just crazy to have my paints here, and try to put some of the lovely color on paper, though, of course, I know I couldn't."

"Where do I come in?" Polly demanded dolefully. "I haven't a single talent."

"Yes, you have. You've got a talent for turning out perfectly dandy fudge, and another great big talent for standing by your friends like a little trump, and—and making them have a perfectly gorgeous time." Jane ended her burst of enthusiasm by reaching over to pat the afflicted Polly, who, with all her gay self-assertiveness, could never be made to think enough of herself.

"You're getting to be as much of a jollier as Marian," said Polly, but she couldn't help looking pleased.

"I scorn the base insinuation." Jane's manner was full of tragic intensity. "Isn't that a quotation from some one, Essie? It ought to be if it

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isn't. You know, Polly, when any one comes into a strange town as I did last spring she just naturally sees all her new friends with very sharp eyes. So you needn't think you can hide your talents from me."

"Hear! Hear!" agreed Esther warmly. "Good for you, Jane."

"Where's Carol Heath this afternoon, Lady Jane?" asked Polly with an abrupt change of subject. "She said she was surely coming up here."

"That doesn't prove it. When she's particularly sure of doing anything you can usually depend upon her to change her mind. She and her mother went into Boston yesterday to see Mr. Heath off, and I dare say we shan't see her till just before the last bell Monday morning."

"My goodness!" cried Polly, who had been watching the game. "Did you see that last serve of Serena's? She's getting so she plays almost as well as Molly."

"Speaking of Carol," pursued Esther, who, the girls said, was always one topic behind the others, "I wish she wouldn't tell such things. Of course they're funny, and we know how to take them—usually, but those other girls, the Rita Mayo set, I mean, say awfully unkind things about her."

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"Well, Carol knows it," Jane answered resignedly. "And it makes her all the worse when she is with them. By the way, Rita doesn't bother our crowd much these days, does she?"

"You know why, don't you?" asked Polly, and when Jane shook her head added, "It's because she couldn't get any of us to propose her for a 'J. N. P.' She happened to hear that one of the girls is going to leave town this fall, so she made love to all of us for a while. She'd feel still worse if she knew that two of the older girls are going to change into 'S. N. P.'s,' and that means three vacancies."

Jane sat upright and looked from Polly to Esther with flattering interest. "Three vacancies," she murmured, and her eyes and smile said even more than her words.

"That takes care of you and Carol, of course, you coaxing thing," said Esther, answering all that Jane had left unspoken. "We're going to wait a while for the other until we find a girl we really want."

"How perfectly lovely," breathed Jane, putting her head against Esther's knee again with a satisfied sigh. "How did you tell me you got the name?"

"My sister and eight other girls started the club, and they got perfectly desperate about a

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name," Esther explained. "At last they all went into my father's study, where he was writing something very important, and they stood up before him and told him he'd got to give them a name for their club. My sister was quaking because they'd interrupted him, but he only laughed and said, 'You look exactly like nine-pins.' And so they took that name."

"And now there's a senior club and a junior," added Jane. "I'm so glad I can join. Mother thinks you do such nice things."

"Well, look out that Essie doesn't blackball you," cautioned Polly, laughing at the horrified face Esther turned upon her at the mere suggestion. "You'd better be nice to her."

"I will, and I'll warn Carol," Jane remarked solemnly, and then they all laughed at their own absurdity.

"Well, anyway, I wish Carol wouldn't make up such ridiculous stories and tell them as if they were true," said Esther, going back to the previous subject of conversation with a persistency that surprised the others. "I'm really awfully fond of her, but I never know whether to dare to take her seriously."

"When in doubt, don't," counseled Jane with exceeding wisdom. "Carol just says those things to make us all stare. She doesn't expect us ——"

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she stopped suddenly to listen, and then to wave rapturously to the occupants of an approaching automobile. "There she is now, I do believe. At least, I don't see Carol, but it's the Heath car with half a dozen boys hanging on it. Come on; let's meet them."

Jane was on her feet and running fleetly before the others started, but they followed as they always did when she invited. Molly Oliver, leaving the tennis court, raced with her for the last few yards amid the cheers of the latest arrivals.

The boys stepped off the running-board as the car came to a stop, and David was just in time to act as a buffer for his twin.

"Crikey, Jane, it was lucky your other half was there," said Rob, looking at her apprehensively. "It makes me shudder to think what would have happened to Carol if you'd hit the car the way you did David."

Jane laughed. "Spinksy's used to stopping me in my wild flights in more ways than one, aren't you, Davy?"

David nodded an assent. "You're getting to be an awfully hard hitter, though, and if it had been a little delicate fellow like Rob or Ned Holt——"

"All lost on her," said Rob with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "You've got to talk faster, Dave, if you want to keep up with that sister of yours."

Jane Stuart's Chum

By this time Jane was at the automobile welcoming Carol. "I'm too glad for words to think you've come. And what are you going to do to me? I've been saying that you probably wouldn't be here just because you promised you would."

"Why, Jane Stuart," Carol made an effort to look grieved, but her dark eyes were dancing, "I'm sure I've been the most dependable person in the world for—for as much as a week. I believe I shall punish you by not letting you have anything from that basket Ned and Jack are carrying."

"Oh, is it a party? I'll be good! I'll be good!" and Jane turned in quick pursuit only to run almost into the arms of Molly Oliver.

"You didn't see Stanley anywhere, did you?" Molly asked with a shade of anxiety in her manner at once apparent to Jane. "David says he went off somewhere after lunch."

"Why, yes, we saw him. The boys shouted to him to come along, but he wouldn't. He was with that Dallas Street crowd, Molly. I should think you'd hate to have Stan go with those boys. They're not a bit nice."

Molly frowned perplexedly, then walked off without a word, her youthful face suddenly older and very sober.

Jane got hold of Carol's arm and gave it a soft pinch as they followed. "Don't you know that's

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just what she does hate?" she said under her breath. Then realizing that Molly's rapid stride had taken her quite out of hearing, she added, "It must be awfully hard trying to be sister and mother both to a brother so near your own age. And Molly's father never seems to have much time for his children."

"Mollyolly's worth twenty of Stan, but you couldn't make him think so," asserted Carol severely. "It's funny how she spoils him when she manages all of us girls so well."

"Sh! We're catching up with her. Now, Carol," Jane changed the subject of conversation abruptly, "if I make you a public apology for doubting you, won't you let me come to your party?"

They had reached the group of girls and boys by this time, and Carol's answer gave great joy to them all. "Down on your knees, fair maid," she commanded, "and say you're sorry."

Jane's knees hit the ground with a force that made her groan. "Ouch! I am sorry. Now may I get up?"

"And after this you'll always consider me an ab-so-lutely reliable person," pursued Carol inexorably. "No, wait; you needn't answer. That would be too much of a strain on anybody. Besides, I can't keep you out of the party, because Daddy said you were to open the basket."

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Hurrah! Mr. Heath's my friend forever!" exploded Jane, rising only to go down on her knees again, this time beside the hamper, and with no mock-penitence, only eager curiosity in her gaze.

It was an enticing, greenish-gold basket adorned with bows of soft dull green, and with a gilded rod stuck through the loops of straw which held the cover. Jane untied the ribbons, and drew out the stick lingeringly. In spite of her own curiosity, she enjoyed prolonging the suspense of the others.

There was a many-toned exclamation, begun by the girls before Jane had time to lift the soft papers, and prolonged into a deep groan of satisfaction by the boys. And so royal a basket of fruit was worthy of their rapture. There were golden oranges and ruddy apples; pears and peaches, blushing rosily and giving forth a captivating fragrance; plums, yellow and red, and a great bunch of purple grapes.

"Did you ever see the like of that?" gasped Serena. "I think your father is a perfect dear to send back such a lovely basket to us."

"Daddy almost always does something nice just as he is starting on a journey. I tell him he is trying to make sure we shall miss him. But it doesn't need anything extra to make me do that," ended Carol with a little sigh.

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"Fathers are perfectly fine, aren't they?" said Polly, who was her father's special comrade.

Jane, helping Carol pass the fruit, heard Polly's remark and felt a little twinge of envy. She could only just remember her father. But then mother was so much better than any other mother she had ever known. All of a sudden she found herself urging the most delicious-looking pear in the basket on Molly Oliver who had lost her mother when she was a very little girl.

"Don't force Molly to take that pear, Jane," David said, laughing a little at his twin's compelling manner. "Perhaps she'd rather have something else."

"I should," Molly announced unblushingly. "I'd rather have one of those gorgiferous plums. Oh, I wish Stan was here. He just loves plums." The worried look stole into her eyes as she spoke of her brother, but she smiled in spite of it and turned to David with a question.

"How's the work going? Isn't that house nearly finished?"

"Almost. Just a few last things to do. We've worked all the morning, so we really deserve this treat now," answered David, consuming a shining apple with great contentment.

"I bet that if we don't finish that house immediately, if not sooner, Mr. Eliot will be here and

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think we're no good," remarked Rob. "Now if the other boys had only worked as hard as I have."

"Don't pound him here, boys," pleaded Jane; "of course I don't blame you, but it makes me nervous to see anything so violent near that basket of fruit."

Rob looked at her reproachfully. "Is that the way you go back on one of the first friends you made in this town? Well, well, you never can tell about girls."

"Isn't there something we can do to help you, boys?" asked Jane, wholly ignoring Rob's melancholy protest.

"You might make us some curtains if you like," proposed Ned.

"And you can give the house," Jack Dexter added, "that distinctive—or instinctive—which do I mean ——?"

"Destructive," suggested quiet David to Rob's great joy.

"That instinctive feminine touch which we boys can't get if we try," finished Jack, frowning at the levity of his companions. "We'll buy the curtain materials if you'll tell us what to get."

"Why don't you let us provide it?" began Serena, but her brother cut her short.

"No, Mr. Eliot gave this house to the boys, and

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we intend to pay for everything that costs money. Of course if you're pining to put some of your superfluous time into making curtains and things we'd like it."

"But you're not to expect, young ladies," said Rob, taking the conversation into his own hands, and imitating Ned's rather high and mighty manner, "that this trifling service will entitle you to a share in the house. Far from it. We boys have built this house and we propose to own it all alone. You will be allowed to visit it once in a while. It may be possible that you will be permitted to dust the sacred precincts occasionally, or to make lemonade and cake when we have company, but ——"

"Oh, cut it out, Rob," growled Ned. "We don't ask the girls to let us join their club, do we?"

"When Uncle Stephen first proposed it, he said Carol and I might help." Jane was mischievously ready to complicate the situation.

"Yes, but you never did," David retorted, going over to the enemy much to the disgust of his twin. "And afterward Uncle Stephen made an arrangement just with the boys."

"Children, children, while you're squabbling the rest of us are simply devouring Carol's fruit," warned Polly. "Let's finish our party and then have some tennis."

Jane Stuart's Chum

"We wouldn't belong to your old club if we could," Peggy said loftily, "and, perhaps, we shan't be ready to come when you want us."

"Don't mention so horrible an idea." Rob looked at her with such well-simulated distress that even the precise Peggy, whose sense of humor was decidedly lacking, had to smile.

"Catch me missing a good time," laughed Jane. "Why can't Carol and I get your curtain material next Saturday, boys? We're going to the city."

This proposition fitting in very well with the boys' ideas, and being strengthened by a promise on the part of the girls to hurry in the making of the curtains, the plan was agreed upon and peace reigned.

"I'll give this basket to the boys for their house, and here's an apple and a pear and some plums left," said Carol, as the group broke up for tennis and ball. "Let's take 'em to some one."

"The girl in the bayberry-candle house," Jane suggested, with no expectation of being taken seriously.

"Not if I know it. I shall take them to Judy and Ken." Carol's face expressed distinct irritation as she turned to Serena. "Jane's got that girl on the brain," she said crossly. "I believe she thinks there's something mysterious going on

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in that house. She saw a sick-looking girl on the piazza, and she heard, what was it, Jane, the clanking of chains and dismal shrieks?"

"You ridiculous thing, I never said a word about chains or shrieks or mysteries," Jane avowed promptly. "Why do you tell such—such yarns, Carol? 'It leads to wuss,' as Mr. Chope says. Anyway 'that girl' refused to notice me when I waved a friendly hand, so I'm out of it."

"I'm glad of it." Carol and Jane were walking toward the tennis court as the former made this fervent remark. "I'm not going to have you getting acquainted with girls when you don't know who they are nor anything about them. Besides, I'm all the time afraid you'll be chummy with some one you'll like better than you do me. Oh, I know I'm a jealous little cat, Jane, but I'm really awfully devoted to you."

There was such a whimsical appeal in the other girl's dark eyes that Jane laughed, and yielded to the arm suddenly flung around her instead of stiffening as she sometimes did. But in the bottom of her mind there was the little irritation which always came when Carol asserted her rights of possession. Jane felt that she should hate an intimacy which would deprive her of liking other girls.

"Oh, well, I can tell you don't care for me so

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much as I do for you," said Carol, looking hurt and taking away her arm.

Jane wondered absurdly whether her inmost thoughts had oozed out through her shoulders, and communicated themselves to Carol by way of the embracing arm. Then as her friend turned away she gave an impatient shrug.

"She'll get over it in a few minutes, and I'm not going to bother my head about it," she said to herself, just as Rob coming up with her racquet hurried her into a game of tennis which had been waiting for her.

The jolly afternoons at the "Reedery" were always to be remembered. Tennis, basket-ball, croquet were begun and interwoven and ended with the gay chatter of girls and boys, keenly responsive to each other, and to all the pleasant influences surrounding them. Then, when the active fun was over, there was the walk home together, with last lovely glimpses of the ocean as the path wandered in curves down the hill. The late afternoon was vibrant with laughter and the sound of youthful voices.

To-day Jane felt the joyous atmosphere so strongly that she hardly noticed the bayberry-candle house which they came upon just where the hill-path and the one from the brook joined. After she had passed, something made her look

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back in time to see a man come out of the house, hurry after David, who happened to be one of the last in the gay procession, and talk with him for an instant. Jane was too far ahead to be able to see the stranger distinctly, though she strained her eyes.

"What did that man want of you, Spinksy?" she demanded, when she and Carol, Rob and David were left by the others at the corner of their street.

"He asked where Dr. Reed lives."

"Goodness! I wonder if that girl is ill. She looks it. He didn't say, did he, who she is, nor ——"

"Nor where they met, nor what he said, and she said and they both said," Carol interrupted with her rippling laugh. "Jane, you're getting 'curiouser' every minute."

"Jane isn't inquisitive; she's interested in people," explained Rob in unexpected championship. "It would be a very good thing if some of the rest of us were."

"I'm to consider myself crushed, I suppose," was the quick rejoinder, as the four stopped a moment in front of Rob's house. "But I don't feel so a bit, Mr. Rob Randall, and I have to know something about people before I get interested in them." Carol stalked off, her slender figure very erect, and her dark head held high.

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The short distance to the Stuart house was covered in silence, and there Jane stopped, but David went on to see Carol to her own door.

"Good-night. Come over," called Jane.

For a moment there was no response. Then came the quick rush of flying feet, and Carol flung herself into Jane's arms.

"J-Jane, I'm scared, and that's why I'm so hateful," she stammered penitently. "Don't you dare to like that girl better than you do me. I can—I can see it coming, and I just can't bear her."

"Goosey!" scorned Jane, hugging her, nevertheless, and feeling, as she often did with Carol, half protecting, half annoyed. "You make me tired. I don't even know her. Come along; I'll walk home with you, too. Poor Spinksy is as patient as the Sphinx he was named for."

CHAPTER IV

THE SILVER PURSE

FOR the next week Jane was vividly conscious of each day as it passed, but, dominating everything, was the thought of the approaching Saturday when she and Carol were to go into the city with Mrs. Heath for a morning of shopping and an afternoon concert given by a famous violinist and his wife. The six days between seemed incredibly long, and Jane's impatience increased as time went on.

"You'd think this Saturday was made just for us," she said, walking into her mother's room for a final inspection before starting for the train. "Perfectly glorious weather, and I'm all of a twitter about that music. It seems as if stores and luncheon wouldn't count at all, but I dare say I shall be able to get a little fun out of those." Jane's eyes were twinkling as she turned slowly around so mother might see that all was in order.

Mrs. Stuart looked up with a preoccupied air from the letter she was reading. Then, catching Jane's mirthful glance, she smiled also.

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"You're going to love the music, I'm sure," she said with satisfying enthusiasm. "And I shan't be surprised to hear that you've enjoyed the stores, and that the luncheon was the nicest you've ever tasted. Are those the best-looking shoes you own, Janey?"

"Yes'm." Jane's meek response ended with a little sigh. "I don't know why I'm so hard on shoes, mumsey. These aren't so very old. Anyway Davy did the best he could for them this morning, and I'm going to forget about them."

"That's right. In every other way you look as nice as I could ask, and the shoes aren't so bad after all." Mrs. Stuart stood a little way off, and directed a critical gaze at that portion of her daughter's toilet.

"You're such a comfort, mumsey. I'm glad you like me. Of course I can't expect to look as stylish as Carol. She's awfully nice about my clothes, only she praises so much I never can believe she means it all. Well, I must get my gloves. The auto will be here in a minute."

Half-way to the door Jane turned abruptly. "Oh, mother, I think I'll spend the five-dollar gold-piece Uncle Stephen gave me. And do you mind if I carry the silver purse—the heirloom, I mean?" She added this last explanation because her mother, who had gone back to the reading of



“YOU MUST TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY”

The Silver Purse

her letter, was regarding her with a puzzled expression.

“Why, I thought Aunt Caroline said that purse was to be treasured and handed down. Besides, I think it is altogether too beautiful and ornate for a little—for a young girl to carry. And if you should lose it—oh, Janey.”

“I suppose it would be dreadful. But then I shouldn’t lose it, and I’m crazy to take it because Carol thinks it’s so stunning. Don’t you believe I might, mother?”

Mother hesitated for so long that her daughter began to feel hopeful. Then she answered slowly, “I shall have to leave it to your own judgment, Jane. You must take the responsibility of deciding.”

“Oh, dear, I do wish sometimes you weren’t so firm when you start out to be,” Jane said with a rueful face. “You’re such a pretty little mother I think it would be much more appropriate for you to say ‘My darling daughter, take the heirloom and use it. Nothing is beautiful if not useful,’ or something like that.”

Mrs. Stuart laughed. “You know you children are all going to help me be firm about bringing you up. It—it isn’t always easy not to let you have your own way, darling.”

“It always seems perfectly easy,” Jane muttered

Jane Stuart's Chum

impatiently, and then felt ashamed of herself because the laughter died out of mother's eyes. "Well, anyway, you don't care if I spend my gold-piece, do you?" she went on with the air of a martyr.

"Of course not. Why don't you get a pair of slippers, Janey? Pretty ones, to wear if you go to a party."

"Oh, mother, do I have to buy something necessary? When you have a present you want to buy something that you wouldn't have if you didn't have it. That sounds funny, but I know what I mean."

"So do I, dear. I've felt just that way myself. But——" Mrs. Stuart's eyes turned involuntarily to her letter. "It's from Mr. Hartley, Janey," she went on with apparent irrelevance.

Mr. Hartley was the lawyer-in Sterling who had charge of Mrs. Stuart's affairs, and Jane's face clouded at the mention of his name.

"Oh me, oh my! His letters are always as blue as indigo. I wish he'd write on pink paper, or do something to chirk 'em up a little. I suppose this time he thinks you're never going to get anything back from the bank. Don't you believe it, mumsey. He's a pessimus. I know that isn't the right word, but you ought to be glad I can remember that much Latin."

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By this time mother was laughing, which was just what Jane wanted, and with a hasty kiss she ran out of the room. She did not feel like talking over discouraging affairs this morning.

"Dear me, I wish mother wouldn't leave things to my judgment," she thought half resentfully. "She knows then I'm bound to decide her way." And at that instant the silver purse lying on her bed caught her eye. She loved the network of links, and the heavy clasp where two puffy-cheeked cherub heads gazed eternally at each other. Perhaps it was too showy for her to carry, but this one time couldn't matter.

"You lovely thing," she said aloud, catching it up, and examining the clasp and chain with critical eyes and fingers. "That's as strong—as strong as an ox. If I use my own judgment I shall take it. And when I bring it back safe and sound mother will see that I'm to be trusted."

The sudden tooting of an automobile horn made her slip into her trim little coat, and snatch up her gloves in frantic haste. "Anyway, I'll have to carry this purse now, because my money is in it and I haven't time to change," she thought, as she ran down-stairs calling back farewells.

Before the automobile was out of sight the entire Stuart family had gathered to shout good-byes and best wishes. Mother and David were at the

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front door, Judy and Susan Trot waved dish-towels from the kitchen, Kenneth and Mr. Chope emerged from the barn.

"You ought to have a good time with all of them wishing it so hard," remarked Mrs. Heath. "You certainly have a nice family, Janey."

"I know it. I'm really quite fond of them myself." Jane was leaning out of the machine for a last wave of the hand, and as she settled into her seat realized that she was clutching the chain of her purse so hard that it hurt. "I've got a nice family," she repeated half to herself, "but not a—mite—of judgment." The last words were jerked out with such conviction that Carol stared at her with frank curiosity.

"Why? What makes you say that?" she asked.

"Oh—nothing. I hope Rob hasn't forgotten that he is going to bring those curtain measurements to the train." Jane's sudden change of topic was so like her that Carol hardly noticed that her question had not been answered.

"Why didn't he take them to your house?"

"He said something about getting some money changed," Jane answered vaguely, and by this time they were at the station, and signals were showing the approach of the train.

"I'm afraid Mr. Robert Randall won't get his curtains," Jane almost shouted, as the noisy ar-

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rival of the train made polite conversation impossible.

"You bet he will if it depends on him," came in a similar shout from just behind her, and there was Rob, very red in the face and rather breathless, but smiling as calmly as though he had all the time in the world.

"There, Lady Jane," he went on, thrusting a paper and a crisp bill into her hand as he helped her on to the train, "there are the measurements and five dollars. Of course we don't expect you to spend nearly all that, but we wanted to seem princely."

"All right. I'll spend it 'freely but not extravagantly,' and bring back the change," Jane said with a laugh, and then the train started and her day was fairly begun.

During the ride to Boston the girls kept up a gay chatter, but underneath it all Jane was trying to plan how to spend her gold-piece. Finally she soothed her conscience by deciding not to buy anything merely ornamental. Drawing materials and paints she positively must have, and these would be a sensible compromise between necessity and frivolity, she assured herself earnestly. After which wise decision she felt much happier, found it pleasanter to think about her mother, and slightly relaxed her exhausting grip of the heirloom.

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Mrs. Heath having to go to the dressmaker, it was agreed that the girls should do their shopping together and meet her in time for an early lunch. Before they separated, however, they all went into a store where Mrs. Heath had left a bracelet to be mended.

Carol's observant eyes were taking in everything within their range of vision while she waited. "Jane Stuart, just look at those rings," she said suddenly, clutching Jane's arm and walking her over to a counter where a tray of rings reposed. "That's just what I've been wanting, a ring for my little finger, and these are too dinky for anything. Only five dollars, too, and that's cheap for such good-looking ones. Try one on, J."

Jane pulled off her glove, and slipped on her smallest finger a curiously wrought silver ring set with turquoise.

"It looks as if it was meant for your finger," said Carol. "There's another one just like it, but it would have to be made smaller for me. I like that blue and silver on your hand awfully well. There's such a difference in hands," she ended with an experienced air. "Some wouldn't look at all well in that combination."

Now that she thought about it, Jane realized that this was what she had been wanting, too. She spread out her hand and gazed at the ring re-

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flectively. She certainly couldn't deny that it was stylish—yes, and very becoming.

"I'll tell you, Lady Jane," Carol's mind had gone ahead swiftly, "let's buy these two just alike and present them to each other. Oh, do, Janey! You said you were going to spend the money your uncle gave you."

"I am," Jane hesitated, "but ——"

"Don't tease Jane to do anything she doesn't want to do," said Mrs. Heath, who had come up in time to hear Carol's proposition. "You've picked out the prettiest ring in the tray, Jane. If you don't take it I think I'll buy it for my niece. It's exceedingly good for the money."

"Oh, mother, you'll make Jane think she ought to let you have it," Carol cried in dismay. "Why don't you buy one of the others for Helen?"

"There isn't another one I care for. But I'd much rather Jane would have it if she wants it. That's honest, Jane."

Jane looked up with a smile. She and Mrs. Heath were very good friends now. "I understand," she said slowly. "I did mean to get something else. But it's my own money. It would be great fun to do as Carol says. I believe ——"

"You believe you will," interrupted Carol triumphantly, and almost before Jane realized the purchase was accomplished, her ring adorned

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her finger, and Carol's was left to be made smaller.

"Now we must think up some perfectly dandy inscription that will make every one curious," Carol said as they walked toward the store where they were to begin their shopping. At that moment they were passing a window full of artists' materials, and Jane sighed involuntarily as she gazed.

"Don't you just hate that old saying about 'you can't eat your cake and have it, too'?" she inquired abruptly. "It gets on my nerves awfully."

Carol saw so little connection between mysterious inscriptions and cake that she stared blankly for a second. Then with an expression of great seriousness she said anxiously, "Jane, dear, do you think that cake you made last Saturday went to your brain? I've noticed all the week you've brought the conversation round to cake or cooking whenever you could."

"You wretch," laughed Jane, with a quick return to her usual gayety. "I am proud of that cake. And now I'm going to have the time of my life. See if I don't."

It was fun hunting for a curtain material which should combine the greatest possible beauty with the least possible expense, and they went to several stores before they were both satisfied.

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"There," said Jane, counting over her change carefully, "I shall have two dollars and eighty-three cents to give back to the boys, and I'm sure they can't expect more than that."

"I should say not." Carol was leading the way toward another department of the store. "I saw something over here as we passed, and I want to investigate it."

The object of her search proved to be a huge bowl which was trying to look as much like cut glass as possible. It was marked one dollar and sixty-nine cents, and its appearance so far exceeded its price that Carol was in ecstasy.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" she demanded. "I'm going to have that sent to Belhaven and give it to the little house. It will be perfectly fine for lemonade when the boys invite us there for parties. I think it's always nice to give a little present at a house-warming, don't you?"

"Lovely," agreed Jane, wishing wildly that the idea had occurred to her before she spent her gold-piece. She pulled off her glove while Carol was making her purchase, and fortified herself with a glance at her new ring, deciding that it was even more becoming than she had supposed.

On the way to the hotel where they were to meet Mrs. Heath, Carol stopped suddenly before the window of a shoe store.

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"Do you mind coming in while I get some slippers? Those black satin ones are perfectly dear. Only four dollars, too. It must be a sale."

Jane sat silent while Carol tried on pair after pair of dainty slippers. She longed to put her foot on a stool and see how it would look in some of the pretty shoes. "Goodness knows I need a pair," she said to herself forlornly. Suddenly she was conscious that she had nothing in her hand, and she looked anxiously for the silver purse and found it lying on the seat beside her. It frightened her to realize that she could put it down without knowing it.

Once out of the store again her good spirits returned. "I'm not going to cry over spilt milk," she told herself with admirable resolution. "It isn't every day that I get a ring, and luncheon at a hotel, and a concert."

The lunch was delicious, and Jane's happiness rose still higher. "It's so lovely to be enjoying yourself as much as you possibly can and know all the time that it isn't going to stop; that there's something just as nice ahead of you," she said with a sigh of satisfaction as the last morsel of raspberry ice slipped down her throat.

"The best part of my day is over," Carol observed gloomily. "I expect to be bored stiff by the concert."

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"Why, Carol Heath, I thought you simply loved music."

"So I do—some kinds. I'm afraid this is going to be too —— Why, mother, there's that Worcester girl I roomed with for a while at school. I'm going over to speak to her."

In two minutes she was back again followed by her friend. "Mother, this is Elinor Merrick, and this is my friend, Jane Stuart, Elinor. Oh, mother, Mrs. Merrick and Elinor are here just for the day, and they have an extra ticket for Hamlet, and they want me to go."

"But, Carol, you forget that Jane is our guest."

"Oh, don't mind me, Mrs. Heath," Jane interposed quickly. "I shall love to go with you, and I know just how Carol feels."

"Janey, you're a duck. You're sure you don't mind? I want you and mother to come over and meet Mrs. Merrick. Isn't Jane a sweet thing, Elinor, to let me go?" and talking, laughing, giving her mother no chance for protest, Carol led the way to the other table.

After that everything was quickly arranged. Mrs. Heath and Jane could not help liking Mrs. Merrick and her attractive daughter, and the desire of the two girls to be together was so genuine and so understandable that it could hardly be denied.

In spite of Carol's absence Jane couldn't be any-

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thing but happy when she found herself in the softly-lighted concert hall. They were early, and there were still many empty seats. To Jane's surprise people were already standing along the sides of the hall.

"How they must love it," she said to Mrs. Heath, "to be willing to stand for so long." As she spoke her eye singled out some one not far from them; a girl older than herself, with brown eyes full of eager expectancy. "See that girl," she added in a low tone; "she looks as if she were going to enjoy it more than any one else, even if she hasn't any seat."

Just then the brown eyes turned in their direction and caught Jane's glance in so friendly a way that it seemed as though their owner must realize that some one was taking an interest in her.

"Why, Janey, how stupid of me!" Mrs. Heath exclaimed suddenly. "Some one may have Carol's seat, of course. Should you like to ask that pretty girl?"

"Oh, may I? I should love it." Jane was out of her seat in a twinkling and making her way to where the girl was standing. It seemed to her that an instant friendship was established when she made known her errand, and the brown eyes looked gratefully into her own gray ones.

"It's Mrs. Heath's ticket, and she thought of

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it," she explained honestly, as they went back together, "so you needn't thank me."

"It was you who picked me out in the first place," answered the girl with a laugh and an obstinate shake of the head. "I caught you at it, and I shall thank you."

Jane laughed, too. "I'm awfully glad to have you sit with us, because you look as if you were going to love the music so much, and I know I am."

"Oh, love it!" answered the girl, drawing a sudden sharp breath, as though no words could express the smallest part of her anticipation. And then the next minute they were in their seats, and she was thanking Mrs. Heath.

The hall filled rapidly now, and a friend of Mrs. Heath coming unexpectedly to sit on the other side of her, the two girls were left to talk with each other. Before the concert began, Jane had learned that her new friend loved music, could play the piano a little, and was even anxious to practice scales and exercises. Which last seemed to Jane quite incomprehensible, until she reflected that she would be quite willing to put slow, patient work into drawing, if not into music.

"Do you read German?" she asked, noticing for the first time the book the other girl was carrying.

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"Yes. My mother was German, and my brother and I were born in Germany. I'm quite like my father, and almost wholly American, but Fritz resembles mother."

"Tell me more, please," begged Jane, keenly interested in this new acquaintance whose life had been so different from her own.

"There isn't much more. Except that when I was fourteen my mother and father died, and I came over here to live with my grandfather. And Fritz went to school there for three years more, and has been with us for the last two years."

"But—but you can't be old enough for all that," Jane said impulsively, trying her best to make fourteen and two and three amount to less than they really do.

"I'm nineteen, and my brother is twenty-one. He is studying to be an artist." The girl's eyes, which had laughed over Jane's funny protest, were full of pride as she mentioned her brother.

"Oh, an artist," began Jane eagerly, and then a burst of applause drew her attention to the stage, where Mr. and Mrs. Marburg were just appearing.

She gave herself up to the charm of the music, and let it carry her where it would. At times she forgot everything around her, even the performers whose fingers wrought magic from their instruments. It was almost, she fancied, as if her spirit

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floated off on the waves of sound only to be enveloped in color, light, melody—all that her beauty-loving soul held dearest.

When the first number ended the two girls turned simultaneously to each other. "Does it make you feel all queer and choky here?" asked Jane, putting her hand involuntarily to her throat. "Isn't it the most wonderful thing you ever heard?"

"Yes," answered the girl, smiling a little and looking as though she knew exactly how Jane was feeling. The hall resounded with applause, and under cover of it Jane spoke again.

"I'm all thrilly," she began shyly, and then hesitated and laughed softly at her own embarrassment. She was gazing into the eager brown eyes, which by their very responsiveness impelled her to stumble on, though her thoughts wouldn't come into shape. "It's just as if," she tried again with a little frown, "as if—all at once—I could be very sure of the part of me that thinks and feels—the real me, I mean—— Oh, why am I trying to say this?" she broke off impatiently. "It's foolish—it's ——"

"I understand," the other girl said quickly. "That's the way Fritz and I feel when we hear beautiful music. I shall tell him about you."

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Jane smiled, frankly pleased, but before she could say anything the music had begun again.

"Do you know how much Mr. Marburg does for other people?" the other girl asked when the next pause came in the music, and then she told about the orchestra the great violinist had established for girls and boys, how these children had been trained to express themselves through their instruments, and how the healing influence of music had crept into some of the poorest homes. "He believes in service to others," she ended dreamily. "And Fritz and I just love him for it."

"Service." Jane said the word over in her mind as the lovely music began again. What was it Dr. Barnes had said in his sermon last Sunday? Something about service to others being the final measure of a man. Mother had talked it over with them that afternoon, and Jane felt ashamed as she remembered how many good resolves she had made and never thought of since. This little talk about Mr. Marburg would keep her from forgetting again, she was sure. She longed to find some one at once who needed her help; she —

Something fell from her lap with a metallic clash just as the music ended, and her new friend stooped quickly to pick it up.

"What a beautiful purse," she said enthusiastically, holding it a moment before restoring it

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to Jane. "It's old, isn't it? I have one something like it that belonged to my grandmother, only mine isn't so beautiful. Do you dare to carry it for shopping? Mine's altogether too precious for that."

"Yes, it's old," Jane said ruefully, "and if I ever get it home it will stay there. I've almost worn my glove through clutching it. Mother didn't want me to take it," she went on with involuntary candor, "but she told me to use my own judgment. I don't know how you can use what you don't seem to have," she ended, laughing a little, and then the short intermission was over, and the audience settled into silence.

As the music went on, Jane's eyes were fixed on the face of the violinist, her ears heard every exultant, soaring note, but her mind was busy with her own particular problems. Suddenly the familiar, overwhelming desire to see mother, and be sure that everything was right with her filled her thought to the exclusion of everything else. It seemed ages since morning, and almost anything might have happened. She caught her breath with an odd little gasp, and looked around, half ashamed, to see if any one had noticed. Then, once more, everything but the appealing, insistent beauty of the music was swept from her conscious thought.

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"Isn't it wonderful? The way they work together, I mean," said the other girl when the final number ended, and the musicians were recalled again and again. "Fritz always says that's what makes for success in anything." She quoted her brother with an assurance which testified her own faith in him. "I'm sorry I must hurry, but I have to make a train. I hope we shall meet again some time." And the next minute she had thanked Mrs. Heath for the seat, squeezed Jane's hand, and was slipping skilfully through the crowd.

"Janey, do you mind going to the station alone if I put you on the car?" asked Mrs. Heath as they drifted down the crowded aisle. "My friend wants me to do one errand with her, and I shall have time enough if you will go ahead and get the parcels from the check-room."

"I don't mind at all." Jane was secretly rather glad that she was to have a chance to think things over quite by herself. They were outside of the hall by this time, and Mrs. Heath slipped two quarters into Jane's coat pocket. "One of those will pay at the check-room," she said as they reached the car, "and the other you can give to the porter for putting you and the parcels on the train. I shall be there on time, so au revoir."

CHAPTER V

"I'VE LOST THE HEIRLOOM"

JANE'S thoughts fairly tumbled over each other as the car bore her to the station. It seemed to her she could hardly wait to get home to tell mother and David all about the lovely music and that very nice girl, and the luncheon and shopping. "Spinksy will be so tickled over that lemonade bowl Carol is going to give the boys," she thought a little wistfully. Half unconsciously she fingered her new ring. Even without taking off her glove she knew just how the blue and silver looked against her hand.

"It's very stylish," she said to herself with a sigh, "but I ought to have known better than to spend my money that way when mother is trying so hard to be economical. Spinksy wouldn't have done it. He and mother work together so well."

For an instant it seemed as though some one had just said that to her about mother and David. Then she remembered that her new friend had remarked it of Mr. and Mrs. Marburg. "And Fritz says," Jane meditated, with an amused consciousness of taking a great liberty with the name of an

Jane Stuart's Chum

entire stranger, " 'that working together perfectly makes for success.' I like that. I wonder if he's preachy. I wish I could know more about the Marburgs, and the children's orchestra. And I should like to see that girl again and meet Fritz. I just love people who make me think nice, serious thoughts—set to music."

She looked out of the window and realized that they were approaching the vicinity of the station. A friendly baby on the opposite side of the car caught her eye, and she nodded and smiled until the child made shy response. The mother looked overburdened with the child and several parcels, and Jane made up her mind to help her when they should reach the station. In the warmth of her resolve it was almost a disappointment when a man came in from the platform and took the baby with an air of proud proprietorship.

When they reached the broad square which must be crossed before arriving at the station, there was a complicated blockade of cars and wagons which made passengers whose train time was near consult their watches with a worried air. One by one people slipped off the car in order to walk across the square, until Jane began to get nervous, and finally decided to walk, too.

Once outside where she could see the station clock, she found that she still had plenty of time,

“I’ve Lost the Heirloom”

and she was just about to start across, when the rapping of a cane on the sidewalk close beside her startled her and made her pause.

Jane realized at once that the man standing there was blind, and with her usual quickness concluded that he wanted to cross the square and hoped in this way to attract attention to his need. She lingered a moment irresolutely. It was strange that some one did not take his arm and lead him across, she thought. Her ready sympathy went out to him. To be alone—and blind—in the midst of this hurrying crowd—she could hardly imagine anything more dreadful.

It made her shiver to think of touching him, but her compassion and the desire to be helpful conquered every other feeling. Impulsively she stepped along to where he was standing with his back toward her, still rapping at intervals on the sidewalk, and grasped his arm.

“Come on,” she said, trying to be as cheerful and friendly as possible, though every inch of her wanted to run away. “I’m going across and I’ll take you.”

For an instant the man yielded to the surprise of being hurried along by this masterful young person; then he pulled away from her strongly.

“’Ere, you,” he said with disconcerting frankness, “wot yer doin’? Hi don’t wanter cross the

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street. That's my stand there on that corner. My boy comes and fetches me when hit's time."

And then Jane saw with a distinct shock that his left hand was full of shoe-strings, and she realized that the rapping of his cane was intended to attract customers.

"Oh, excuse me. I'll take you right back," she apologized, grasping his grimy sleeve with an even greater shrinking than she had felt before. As she piloted him back to the sidewalk she could hear him muttering something about interfering people who wanted to spoil the little business a poor man had.

She took from her pocket one of the quarters Mrs. Heath had placed there. "There, I've put you in the exact spot," she said anxiously, "and here's twenty-five cents, and you needn't mind about giving me any shoe-strings, because I'm in a hurry."

Going across the square, Jane fancied nervously that she could still hear the tapping of the cane. "Ugh! He might have been the least little bit thankful for what I meant to do," she said to herself as she entered the huge station. "After this, Jane Stuart, you'll mind your own affairs, and try not to be so helpful."

In pursuance of which stern resolve she almost walked over a white-haired old gentleman who



THE OLD GENTLEMAN PROTESTED

“I’ve Lost the Heirloom”

had stumbled, and gone down on his knees just in front of her. She was ashamed afterward to think that her first impulse was to go on as quickly as possible, but before she had time to do that she found herself helping him to his feet. The suitcase he had been carrying had sprung open as it fell, and scattered part of its contents on the floor.

Jane began to pick up things at once and lay them hurriedly into the suit-case.

“My dear young lady,” the old gentleman protested, trying to stoop to aid her, and giving it up on account of his shaking knees. “My dear young lady, I ——” he broke off suddenly to look at the station clock, and to compare it with his watch, which he held to his ear. “Dear me! What shall I do if I miss this train? She told me ——”

He looked at Jane so helplessly that she, cramming the last things into the suit-case, felt at once that she must protect him from further trouble.

“If you’ll tell me where you’re going perhaps I shall have time to see you on your train,” she suggested, rising to her feet.

“Oh, I couldn’t possibly let you,” said the old gentleman, making a tremulous effort to grasp the suit-case, and dropping a book which he had somehow managed to keep under his arm.

Jane went to the rescue again, only to have her hat nearly jerked off her head by the crooked

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handle of the umbrella, now quite unmanageable in the trembling old hands.

"Bless my soul! I'm not fit to be trusted out alone," the old gentleman said plaintively. "If I ever get back to Marston, I'll ——"

"Oh, are you going to Marston?" Jane asked joyously, relieved to hear a name which sounded familiar. "I know where the Marston trains go out, and I'll take you there." She had straightened her hat, and restored the book and umbrella to their owner while she was talking; now she picked up the suit-case and started across the station.

"I don't know how to thank you," the weary old gentleman said breathlessly as they reached the train, and a brakeman took the suit-case. "I hope we shall meet again some time." Another passenger mounting the steps necessitated further progress, and the old man disappeared within the car.

Going out through the gate again Jane's eye fell on the nearest clock, and she realized that it was quite time for her to go to the parcel-room. "I'd better take a quarter out of my own purse," she told herself, "to make up for the one I spent. I hope that poor shoe-string man's feelings have got over being hurt."

And then, with a suddenness that left her shak-

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ing, she discovered that the heirloom was no longer hanging from her wrist, nor clutched tightly in her hand. She tried desperately to recall when she had last been conscious of it, but the most that she could be sure of was that she had it when she started in the car. “I remember thinking I would put Mrs. Heath’s money into it,” she said to herself despairingly. “And then I changed my mind.”

She started once more toward the parcel-room, gripping tightly the quarter that still remained. “It’s up to me to get those packages on the train. But—the heirloom! And two dollars and eighty-three cents to give back to the boys!” This last thought ended in a deep sigh, and in her absorption Jane walked straight into some one who seemed to be trying to put himself in her way.

“I beg your pardon,” she said hastily, without even glancing at the person, but when she tried to go on she found her progress still impeded, and she looked up indignantly to meet Rob Randall’s familiar smile.

“I was wondering how many times I could make you walk over me, Lady Jane,” he said calmly. “Just because you’ve spent the day in the city is no reason why you should snub your little out-of-town playmates.”

“Oh, Rob, oh, Rob!” The very sight of his

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familiar face, so associated with David's, was making her almost incoherent in her relief. "Robert Randall, I've done the most awful thing you ever heard of. I've—I've ——"

"Go easy, Jane. See here, we've got twenty minutes before the train starts. Now take time and tell me all about it." In his desire to be soothing Rob was so funnily stern that Jane had to smile, but she was serious again in a moment.

"Rob, I'm not fit to be trusted with anything," she confided, looking at him with despairing eyes. "You see I got dreadfully rattled over that shoe-string man, but I'm almost sure I had it on the car. And, of course, I had to grab for my hat when the old gentleman's umbrella ——"

"Begin again now and go very slowly," Rob said in an exceedingly gentle voice. He was looking at her anxiously, but Jane was too unhappy to notice.

"Why, Mrs. Heath gave me two quarters," began Jane obediently, "and I gave one of them to the shoe-string man, and then the old gentleman's suitcase was so heavy ——"

"It was his umbrella before," Rob murmured helplessly. "Jane, what is it that's worrying you, anyway?"

"I'm explaining it to you, if you'll only listen,"

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she answered with pathetic dignity. “I’ve lost two dollars and eighty-three cents that belonged to you boys, and—the heirloom.”

“Hang the money,” growled Rob. “Don’t you trouble a bit about that. And I don’t know what your precious heirloom is, but I’ll get it back or buy you another, see if I don’t.”

The absurdity of buying another heirloom didn’t strike Jane at the moment. She was only conscious of the sustaining comfort of having some one want to make things easier for her.

“Rob, you’re next best to having Davy,” she remarked with a sudden little sniff which her tactful friend ignored.

“All right, just play I am old Spinksy. And now let’s get on the train.”

“But I must get Mrs. Heath’s packages first. They’re at the parcel-room.”

“Jiminy! ‘The worst is yet to come.’ Well, we’ll get ’em and then hustle for seats. This train is always crowded.”

Jane was really thankful that she couldn’t sit with Carol, who was looking daggers at the presumptuous woman who had taken the seat she was trying to save, nor with Mrs. Heath, who was inclined to resent having been made so anxious. Instead she slipped gladly into one of the small end seats, where she was completely extinguished

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by a woman carrying a huge box, and could think over her troubles in peace.

After that, in her absorption, she was hardly conscious of anything that was going on until the journey was half over, and she realized that Carol was sitting down beside her.

"I've had my eye on that woman ever since we left the last station," laughed Carol. "She's been dropping and picking up bundles every other minute, and I wondered if you were still alive."

"Has she?" asked Jane, a little dazed by this sudden interruption of her thoughts. She was just in the midst of an imaginary interview with Aunt Caroline in which she was trying to break the news of the loss of the heirloom.

"Has she? Well, where have you been? Do tell me about the girl you met at the concert. Mother said you were very chummy with some one."

Jane drew a quick breath of relief and plunged into a description of the concert. It occurred to her that if she could keep up a lively conversation Carol might not notice that the silver purse was gone. It seemed as if she couldn't explain about that again to-night.

"She was an awfully nice girl; pretty and rather stylish. She wore her clothes well, you know," ended Jane, feeling around for the qualities that

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most attracted Carol. “I’d like to see her again, but I never thought to tell her my name or to ask hers. I loved to talk with her.”

For some reason it didn’t seem easy to explain to Carol just what she had liked best about the girl: the little intimate talk which had made her feel so thoughtful, so eager to be helpful. She could tell all that to mother and David, but with Carol for a listener it was different.

“For goodness’ sake don’t go off into another trance! Your eyes are as big as dinner-plates. Tell me some more. What made you so late for the train, and where did you find Rob Randall?”

Carol’s insistent questions brought Jane back to the present with a little jump. Suddenly it struck her how funny it was that she should have tried to lead that unwilling shoe-string man across the crowded square. She had meant not to tell any one but mother, but she was quite sure it would amuse Carol.

“I was having adventures,” she began solemnly, though the laugh in her eyes spoiled the effect she intended. “Will you promise not to tell what I did if I tell you? I should never hear the last of it if the boys got hold of it.”

Carol assented eagerly, and Jane began her story which seemed more and more absurd to her as she went on.

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"That's the funniest thing I ever heard, Jane Stuart. But how did you dare? I wouldn't have touched him for anything." Carol's shudder was quite uncontrollable.

"I suppose I ought to have waited for some older person to do it," confessed Jane soberly. "Spinksy's always scolding me for rushing into things. But—something had made me want to be so helpful, and I thought that was the place to begin." An irrepressible twinkle lighted her eyes, and her dimple came and went, and came again.

"I didn't stop with that," she went on meekly. "A nice old gentleman fell at my very feet, and I just had to help him."

To Jane's relief this story lasted until they reached Belhaven, and Carol, deeply interested, had no chance to notice the loss of the silver purse.

"Say, Jane," Rob muttered softly as they walked toward the automobile, "I've been making up advertisements all the way out; like 'Lost: a gold-headed gentleman's cane' or something of that kind. We'll get your old ——"

The last part of the sentence was unspoken, for, in response to an invitation from Mrs. Heath, Rob sprang up beside the chauffeur, and the machine glided away from the station and into the cool darkness of the street.

When they reached the Stuart house Rob was

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down in a second and waiting to give Jane a steadying hand as she stepped from the machine. “Thank you so much, Mrs. Heath, for inviting me,” she said once more. “It was just lovely, and I shall never forget it. Good-night. Come over, Carol.”

There was a little quiver in Jane’s voice which, fortunately, Carol did not notice, but Rob heard it and longed to say something consoling.

“Look here, Mrs. Janes,” he began, quite unconsciously using David’s name for his twin, “promise me that you won’t worry any more to-night.”

“I can’t help it,” answered Jane decisively. “Any one would worry. And when I think of telling mother, and worse than that, Aunt Caroline!” Jane stopped for a moment and swallowed hard. No boy except her two brothers had ever seen her cry, nor ever should, she vowed. Then, “Come in, Rob,” she urged in quite a natural tone; “you know Davy always has something he wants to see you about.”

“Thanks, I can’t. Mother will be anxious to know about the errand I did for her. Besides, they seem to be having a party at your house.”

Jane, who had been facing the street, turned quickly. The shades were up in the brightly lighted library, and she could see plainly that

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mother was talking with a small, white-haired lady ; that Kenneth and Judy were clinging fondly to an elderly gentleman ; that David's arm was around the shoulders of a tall, dark boy.

" Aunt Caroline," Jane murmured with a little catch in her breath. " And Uncle Stephen and Donald. Oh, Rob, I just can't go in."

" Come over and call on my mother for a few minutes." Rob's suggestion was sympathetic if not very wise. " They must be going soon. Your aunt is putting on her hat."

Jane stared blankly into the darkness. All at once she was conscious that it had been a long day, and that she was tired. She wondered if it would do to slip in the back way, and so up to her room. Mother would understand, she was sure. She half turned toward the back of the house, then, with quick impulse, again faced Rob.

" You're not half strict enough to play at being Spinksy," she said with weary decision. " You and he wouldn't sneak out of anything like that, so why should you expect me to? I can just hear in my mind's eye old Spinksy saying ' Play up, Mrs. Janes.'

" Oh, I'm not out of my mind," she went on with a little laugh, " if I did say I could ' hear with my eye.' Now I'm going straight into the house to have it out with Aunt Caroline before I

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get shaky again,” and Jane sped up the path with a wave of her hand, leaving Rob to wonder whether the joy of being a twin brother would make up for the perplexity thereof.

Once in the house Jane greeted her relatives, resolving meanwhile that the disclosure of her misfortune should only be postponed until politeness had had its way.

“Jane, you darling,” cried Aunt Caroline, coming to her at once and embracing her with the old fervor. “I was so afraid you wouldn’t get here before we left. Dear me, how fast you grow. Stephen, do see how tall Jane is, and she’s prettier than ever, I do believe.”

“Any one looks pretty to me when I like her as much as I do Jane,” Uncle Stephen said with the kind smile that always gave Jane a sense of inexpressible well-being. “Let go of my hands, you rascal, Kenneth, so that I may say how do you do to your tall sister.”

Then Donald, rather shy, but quite evidently beaming with happiness, came up to greet Jane.

“Look at him,” said Aunt Caroline mournfully, calling the attention of every one and thereby greatly embarrassing her grandson. “I haven’t seen him look so joyous since we took him away from here. He doesn’t care a bit about his grandfather and me.”

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"Oh, grandmother," protested Donald, casting an appealing glance at his grandfather, and losing his happy expression entirely.

"Now, Caroline, that isn't fair. Don likes it because he's getting back among his first friends again. He's glad, too, that he's going to be in a home—a real home. This living around in hotels isn't any way ——"

"Stephen, I beg of you, don't begin on that subject," interrupted Aunt Caroline with a resigned air. "Your Uncle Stephen has a positive spite against hotels," she added, turning to Mrs. Stuart. "I'm sure I've given Donald enough entertainment in the two months he's been with us. We have stayed in at least four different cities, and at one beach. And I thought he would just love this trip around the world, but he fairly begged to come here instead." Aunt Caroline's voice was growing more and more plaintive, and by this time Donald looked wholly uncomfortable.

"There, there, Caroline," said Uncle Stephen soothingly. "This is going to be our trip around the world, and Donald can take his later. And here's Miss Jane looking at you with big eyes because she doesn't understand anything about it."

"Why, Jane, darling, so you don't." Aunt Caroline was surprisingly restored to her customary joyous animation. "Well, we're really going

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—next week—with a perfectly delightful party. Your mother says Donald may stay here, and—oh, I wish we could take Jane instead. I should just love to buy pretty things for a girl.”

“Caroline, it’s nearly train-time. I can hear the station-carriage stopping outside now.” Uncle Stephen gently inserted one of his wife’s arms into the sleeve of her coat as he spoke. “You’ve tried unsuccessfully to borrow Jane before this, you know. You should remember that these young people must have a chance to go to school.”

“There are plenty of things I don’t do that I should,” responded Aunt Caroline petulantly, turning to Donald to be buttoned into her coat. “And Jane loves traveling, and I’m so fond of her.”

“But you won’t be, Aunt Caroline, when you hear what I’ve done.” Jane’s voice held an unconscious heroism which drew the gaze of the entire family, but Jane, herself, had grown very pale and was evidently unhappy. “I’ve—I’ve lost the heirloom.”

“Well, never mind, child, I’ll buy you something to make up for it while I’m abroad. What shall I bring you?”

Even to one who knew Aunt Caroline’s capacity for saying the unexpected this was a little staggering, and Jane tried again. Probably her aunt

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didn't remember what it was they called the heirloom, she told herself blankly.

"You—you don't understand," she faltered. "I mean the silver purse." Jane suddenly felt mother's arm around her, and she finished the sentence with more courage, "The silver purse that belonged to little Aunt Jane."

For an instant Aunt Caroline hesitated. Then she said with an unexpected gentleness, "It's too bad, but you couldn't help it, of course. Perhaps it will be found. And if it isn't—well, anyway, your Aunt Jane wouldn't want me to scold her namesake."

There was an audible sigh of relief from David, who had edged up close to Jane, and then, to the surprise of every one, Kenneth fairly flew at Aunt Caroline and caught her in an embrace that almost took her off her feet. "You darling—woman," he said explosively, and with fiery cheeks rushed away, only to be interrupted by Uncle Stephen's friendly arm.

"Well, what under the sun did you expect of me?" demanded Aunt Caroline with some irritation. "From the way you all act any one would think I was perfectly inhuman. I do try sometimes to be, what do you call it, Donald, a real sport."

"You certainly succeeded that time," said her

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husband promptly. “It’s lucky I ordered that carriage ten minutes earlier than necessary, but we must go now.”

“Don’t let her wet even the tips of her little shoes,” proposed David, throwing off the shyness he usually felt in Aunt Caroline’s presence and stepping gallantly to the front. “Come on, Don.” And before the little lady could protest the two boys were bearing her gently down the damp walk toward the carriage.

“That’s one of the happenings that makes me know why I can’t help loving Aunt Caroline,” said Jane wearily, as she and mother turned back into the house. “But oh, mother, there is such a lot to tell you. I’m so sorry for—for this morning.”

“Why, of course, Janey, I knew you would be.” Mother’s dear, satisfying smile gave Jane the first feeling of real comfort she had had for some time. “We’ll talk it all over to-morrow, dear. Now come and have the supper Susan has saved for you.”

Later on not even the darkness and mother’s good-night kiss could bring sleep to Jane’s eyes. Try as hard as she could to still it, a persistent little voice inside would keep reminding her that she owed the boys two dollars and eighty-three cents, and that her own five dollars, out of which she might have paid it, was gone.

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Suddenly an illuminating idea struck her, and she sat up in the intensity of her relief. Then she got out of bed and turned on the light, and searched in her top bureau-drawer until she found a small blue velvet box. She held her hand under the light and realized all over again the becomingness of the blue and silver ring, but sternly repressing her feelings, she stuck it into the velvet groove and closed the box with a snap.

"There, if Mrs. Heath still wants it for her niece that part of my trouble is over," she said to herself as she slipped back into bed. "And now perhaps I can go to sleep."

CHAPTER VI

THE BAYBERRY-CANDLE GIRL

"IF you'd been like some people you would have said, 'Jane, I told you that you would lose the heirloom,' but instead you just snuggled up and put your arm around me. Oh, mother," Jane ended with a remorseful sniff, and cuddled as close as she could. It was the morning after her exciting day in Boston, and she had slipped into mother's bed to tell her all about it before breakfast.

Mother laughed the little tender laugh she always had for her elder daughter's pathetic absurdities, and cuddled, too. She didn't seem to mind that Jane's golden locks were straying into her eyes, nor that the strong young arms were holding her in an almost painful embrace.

"What's the use of saying that after the thing is done? And I've no doubt you remembered well enough."

"I should say I did. But I was so scared for fear Aunt Caroline would have hysterics, or faint dead away that I couldn't think of anything else." Jane's little shudder was quite involuntary.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Wasn't she perfectly fine about it, though? Well, I never can make it up to her, but I know what to do about the rest of it," and Jane imparted to her mother the plan she had hit upon in regard to the ring.

"I couldn't resist having one little wear of it this morning," she finished, pulling one hand out from under the bedclothes and holding it up where the light could fall on it. "It's a dear ring, isn't it, mumsey?"

There was such a wistful note in her voice that Mrs. Stuart searched her mind for some solution of the problem that would enable Jane to keep the ring. "I wish," she began hesitatingly, but Jane silenced her with an impetuous kiss.

"I know just what you're going to say, and you mustn't. I'm going over to see Mrs. Heath tomorrow afternoon and ask her to take the ring. And then, out of that money, I can pay the boys and settle with Rob for the advertisements."

"I suppose that's the best way," mother said reluctantly, struggling with a violent desire to go without something herself. "I should like to give you the money for the boys and let you keep the ring, Janey, but I'm not sure that it would be quite fair. Your 'pessimus,' Mr. Hartley, wrote that the bank settlement doesn't look at all encouraging."

The Bayberry-Candle Girl

“Oh, mother, and I talked about my own affairs like a selfish beast and wouldn't let you tell me anything about yours—ours, I mean.” The force of Jane's repentant hug brought tears into her own eyes. “After this I'm going to work with you. That's what ‘Fritz’ says I ought to do. That is, he doesn't know me, and what do you suppose he'd say if he knew a strange girl was calling him by his first name? Anyway he and his nice sister and that glorious music made me feel so good and helpful yesterday. I only hope it may last.”

“Next time, darling, try being helpful right here in Belhaven instead of when you're alone in the city,” mother suggested gently, hating to quench her daughter's ardor.

“Yes'm. I thought of that—afterward.” Jane was meekness itself. “You couldn't have helped liking that nice silvery-haired, tottery old gentleman, though. When he took out his watch and said, ‘Dear me, dear me, I shall be late,’ all I could think of was the White Rabbit in ‘Alice in Wonderland.’ And—and I felt a little bit like Alice myself.”

“Who's talking about the White Rabbit?” demanded Judy from the next room, and that young person herself appeared a second later. “Oh, mother, I want to get into bed with you, too.

Jane Stuart's Chum

Jane, you look just like 'Medusa of the snaky locks.'"

An indignant voice answered her as Kenneth strolled in from the hall, fully dressed. "She isn't a Gorrygon," he declared firmly. "If she's anything except just our Jane she's a princess. But, I say, you people are lazy. I've got my hens all fed, and I've been in to see whether Don is real or just a dream."

"And which is he?" questioned Jane, with such well-simulated anxiety in her voice that before he thought, Kenneth found himself answering her seriously.

"Oh, I know you're just kidding me," he added hastily. "Anyway, this clock has stopped, and I bet there isn't more than a half an hour for you all to get ready for breakfast."

"Skip then, and tell Susan not to be too much in a hurry," said Mrs. Stuart. "Fortunately, we can all use the same half hour, though you don't seem to think so."

Between breakfast and church Jane found time to tell David and Donald about her experiences. After church when she went to her room she found a small object enclosed in tissue-paper and held on her pincushion by four large black-headed pins.

"It's Spinksy's gold-piece that Uncle Stephen

The Bayberry-Candle Girl

gave him," she said to herself with instant conviction as she took off the paper. "Isn't he an old dear?"

Without waiting to take off her hat she marched into her brother's room and found him already deeply absorbed in a book.

"Spinksy, you're a perfect gentleman," she began gratefully.

"Mrs. Janes, I'm busy reading and it's rude to interrupt me," he answered without lifting his eyes, but Jane could see that he looked exceedingly conscious.

"I believe that book is upside-down," she cried, swooping down on him so suddenly that he had no time to change it.

"You were too quick for me," he growled. "I'd just got back here when I heard you coming."

"Well, I love you for thinking of it, but I couldn't pos-sib-ly take your gold-piece," said his twin firmly. "I'll leave it here on the bureau."

"Oh, why?" said David in his most wheedlesome way, catching her by the wrists, and preventing her from putting down the gold-piece. "I'm your little twin brother, and you ought to give up to me sometimes. Mother says so."

"I know it," laughed Jane, "but, you see, this isn't one of the times," and with a sudden lunge

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she skilfully managed to drop the gold-piece into his pocket. "Thank you, just the same, Mr. Spinksy Stuart, but you can't take my punishments for me the way mother says you used to want to."

"Well," David relinquished his idea with reluctance, "I wish you'd let me. Perhaps the purse will be found."

"Never." Jane shut her lips firmly on the word. "Rob thinks it will, but I'm sure it won't. Anyway, I'm going to try not to worry about it. Good-bye. You'll know more if you read with your book right-side up."

With which impertinent remark Jane went in the direction of her own room, only to meet Donald wandering about in the hall and looking as if he were trying to get up courage to knock on her door.

"Hello, Jane," he said with an air of embarrassment. "I've been trying to find you. Or, at least, I tried to find Cousin Elizabeth first, but she's busy with some one down-stairs. Say, Jane, I wanted to ask you—I mean I was going to ask your mother—if—if you wouldn't let me make up that money you lost."

"Oh, wait a minute. Don't say no. You see, grandmother and grandfather are awfully generous to me, and if I tried a million years I never

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could begin to do for this family what they've done for me, and—oh, please take it." He was holding out a bill as he finished; a bill so crisply clean and pretty that in itself it was a temptation.

Jane was conscious of a sudden keen desire to take the money and have done with it. She could quite understand that it would be a pleasure to him to give it to her, and that he wouldn't miss it in the least. Then she brushed the idea aside with a secret scorn for her own weakness.

"Thank you ever so much, but I couldn't," she said simply. And then with her gay laugh, "And if I could, my 'ma wouldn't let me," as Susan says. Oh, Don, isn't it nice you're going to stay with us this winter?"

"Great." Donald tucked the money away as he spoke, realizing that Jane's air of finality left him no chance for protest. "It seemed as if I couldn't wait to get here, and now it's all so natural I feel as if everything else had been a dream."

"Do you really think you're going to like living in this little town better than all the wonderful things you might have seen if you had gone with Aunt Caroline?"

"Wonders don't count for so much when all your life you've wanted a real home, and boys—and girls." Donald was staring out of the hall window as though a picture of his lonely child-

Jane Stuart's Chum

hood had risen before his eyes. "It sounds selfish to be so glad to be here when grandmother and grandfather have been so perfectly fine to me. But I think grandfather understands."

"Every one understands, dear boy," said Mrs. Stuart, coming up to them just then. "Even Aunt Caroline, I'm sure, though she likes to pretend she doesn't. And we're all so glad to have you."

"Thank you, Cousin Elizabeth," answered the boy in his quick, affectionate way. Jane, looking on, liked to see him put his arm around her mother. "Most boys would get all red and embarrassed," she said to herself as they separated to make ready for dinner. "It certainly comforts me in my affliction to have such a dandy brother and cousin," she thought, as she took off her hat, and meditatively pushed and patted her hair into place before the mirror. "Two boys 'with but a single thought.' But I couldn't let 'em, of course."

It had been easy enough to plan to ask Mrs. Heath to buy the turquoise ring, but when Monday afternoon came it took all Jane's courage to go over there and propose it. She had secretly hoped that Carol would not be at home, but a rapturous welcome from that young person floated down from up-stairs the moment the front door was opened.

The Bayberry-Candle Girl

"Come on up, Lady Jane. I saw you speeding up the driveway. The expressman has just brought that beautiful near-cut-glass bowl, and I'm trying to think up a presentation poem."

"I'm no good at rhymes," protested Jane. "I—I've come on an errand, and I want to see your mother."

"And not me? Why, Jane Stuart, I'm shocked. I'm coming with you anyway, unless it's something really private." Carol was leading the way to her mother's room as she talked.

"Oh, no; not at all private. It's just that I want to see—to see ——" she hesitated so long that Carol opened her mouth to speak, but shut it again hastily. "I'm going to ask your mother if she would still like that ring for her niece," Jane went on unhappily. "I really need the money for something else, and—well, I ought not to have spent it for that, anyway."

"Janey, you can't mean that you're going to spoil our nice little twin ring idea. How can you when yours was a present from me? My feelings will be dreadfully hurt." Carol stopped short and turned to look at her friend. Then, with one of those sudden changes so characteristic of her, her mind leaped to a quick appreciation of the situation. It was evident that Jane was unhappy; therefore, she must be comforted. "Of course,

Jane Stuart's Chum

mother will still want it," she hurried on. "And I was just fooling. I really don't care a bit. Those rings are rather common, anyway."

It was such an unexpected ending, and so great a relief to Jane's feelings that she laughed and felt happier. "Carol Heath, you're a duck; at this moment I think you're the nicest chum I ever had."

"Goodness gracious! Usually you are such a narrow-minded twin thing that you won't admit that any one but David is your chum," scolded Carol. "Do you really mean that I'm it?"

"You're one of them," Jane began mischievously, then, at sight of Carol's disappointed face, would have said something different, but they were just entering Mrs. Heath's room, and the lady herself looked up from her reading with a smile of welcome.

This part of the ordeal was not so trying as Jane had imagined, for Mrs. Heath seemed pleased to have the ring, and after the first moment of surprise, aided, perhaps, by mysterious signals from Carol, made no comment on Jane's probable sacrifice.

In her mind Jane said a fond good-bye to the blue and silver circlet as it was slipped into a drawer near Mrs. Heath. At the same time she braced herself with the thought that the five-dol-

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lar bill she was tightly clutching would get her out of a part of her trouble, at least.

"Come on now and help me with my poem," urged Carol when the two girls left Mrs. Heath's room. "I thought I might begin with

" 'All is not gold that glitters,
All is not cut glass that shines,'

or something like that. 'It doesn't sound very much like poetry, though, and I can't think of a blessed word except 'fritters' that will rhyme.'

"Ask Esther Strong. She knows heaps of them. I'd like to stay, honestly, but I told mother I'd hurry, and I've got to find Spinksy, and see Rob." Jane ran out of the front door as she ended, and down the driveway. Half-way to the street she turned and waved her hand to Carol still looking after her. "Come over," she called clearly.

Carol nodded a violent assent, then, as her friend disappeared from view, betook herself into the house with a very sober face.

"You don't know what it is to be a real, intimate chum," she remarked, gazing straight at the newel-post, but seeing instead a gray-eyed, fair-haired girl. "You like me well enough, but you like several others just as much, and I want to be the—whole thing." There was a long silence

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after this candid avowal, during which Carol sat on the lowest stair, and thought hard. Finally she got up and gave herself a little shake. "I'm certainly fonder of Jane," she announced decidedly, "than I ever was of any other girl, but that doesn't seem to count for much. I'm going to see Esther. She's a good old thing, and she'll help me out with my 'glittering fritters.'"

When she had given the money to Rob, Jane's peace of mind came back to a great degree, and as she had sternly resolved not to worry about the heirloom she managed with fair success to keep it out of her thoughts. True to her predictions, advertisements and inquiries brought no result, and after two weeks had gone by, even Rob, who had valiantly tried to keep up the courage of his afflicted friend, was forced by her to confess that his own faith was gone.

"If Aunt Caroline hadn't been so perfectly angelic about it I believe it wouldn't hurt me so much to think I've lost it," Jane said one afternoon when she had come down-stairs to find Rob waiting on the piazza for David and Donald. "I try not to worry, but I can't help dreaming about it every little while. And almost always that girl I met at the concert is in the dream, and when I run to catch her she's lost or I wake up. I wish you and Spinksy could know her, Rob. She's older

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than we are, of course, but that doesn't make any difference."

"Bring her on. I'll be willing to meet her any old time," conceded Rob generously. "'To know me is to love me,' or something like that."

"Conceited thing! You talk as if she was something to eat—on a platter. I can't 'bring her on.' I only wish I could. What are you boys going to do this afternoon?"

"We are going over to the House in the Woods. We're thinking of naming it that after one of the palaces of the Queen of Holland. I'd say it for you in Dutch, but you wouldn't understand it, of course."

"Just listen to him," murmured Jane, clasping her hands in pretended admiration. "Does it ever hurt to know so much, Rob?"

"Say, Mrs. Janes, mother thinks you can tell where her scissors are. The pair she lets us cut paper with." David and Donald came out on the piazza at this moment with several interesting-looking packages in their hands.

"I'll get them. I forgot to return 'em the last time." Jane slipped away and was back in a moment. "What are you going to do over at the little house, Spinksy?" she asked pleadingly. "I think you might let some of us girls go over and look on. I promise not to make fun of you, or say a single word if you don't want me to."

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"Why don't you let her come?" seconded Donald. "I'll take care of her and see that she doesn't get into any mischief."

"Good gracious, hear the boy talk!" exclaimed Jane, gazing with pretended awe at her tall cousin, who had already begun to seem to the twins like a nice older brother. "Thank you very much, Mr. Donald Lee. I wouldn't come now, anyway; and I haven't the slightest interest in your 'House in the Woods.'" She walked toward the other end of the piazza with a little toss of the head, and an expression which she tried to make disdainful.

"Now, now, Mrs. Janes," David coaxed, catching her by the arm as she passed him, and smoothing her as if she were a wrathful kitten. "The boys will think you really mean it if you're not careful. Just wait till next week."

"Oh, are you going to have your house-warming next week?" Jane forgot all pretense of indifference in her ardent enthusiasm. "How perfectly fine! Run along, then, and get things ready. I'll forgive you for not wanting me this afternoon."

"It's wonderful what a good disposition the child has," chuckled Rob as the boys left the piazza, but even this irritating remark failed to disturb the serenity of the young person in question, who loved the Friday night parties which the

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Belhaven young people gave, and rejoiced in the prospect of one so near at hand.

Jane looked after the three boys as they walked away. "Don is going to fit right in with the other boys, and he looks like a different being even in two weeks," she said aloud as they turned a corner and disappeared from her sight.

"Which only proves, doesn't it, that young people need young people, and natural amusements," responded mother's voice, so surprisingly near that Jane was really startled.

"Mumsey, how you frightened me! But that was just what I was thinking. I don't wonder poor Don hated living at hotels, and never having any real fun. I'm awfully sorry for any one who doesn't know a lot of girls and boys."

"You're never going to be troubled that way, are you, Janey?" responded mother, thinking meanwhile in her inmost heart that it was small wonder this daughter of hers with the sunshiny locks and the engaging smile should be so popular with her companions.

"Never! Never so long as I can hunt up even one other person to have fun with me," declared Jane with fervor. "Talking about it makes me want to see a girl right away. Let me see. Carol's gone to the city with her mother. Serena and Peggy are going to embroider and I don't want to

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sit still even with them. Polly—oh, mother, may I go to Polly's house? It's almost their last day on the hill, and I shall miss it so."

"Run along then, but start in good season for home, because it begins to get dark early."

"We can hardly see the lines," Polly said doubtfully as they were tightening the net a half hour later. "We're going so soon that father thought it wasn't worth while to have the court marked out again."

"We can guess at it." Jane had turned away for a moment and was gazing oceanward. "Who's that on the beach, Polly? Is it—is it that girl from the bayberry-candle house?"

"Uh-huh." Polly seized her racquet and tried a back-handed stroke across the net. "That's the old lady she lives with, and they go down to the beach almost every day. Her guardian came to see father about two weeks ago."

"Probably that was the man we saw. Has Dr. Reed met her, and has he told you about her?"

"Yes, he's been to see her, but father never tells us about his patients. He did say that he tried to get her to let me call. I guess he thought my lovely nature would have a good effect on her," said Polly absurdly. "But she doesn't want to know any one."

"Well, we can get along without her," Jane de-

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clared, prejudiced at once against a girl who could feel that way. "Come on, Pollykins."

Having arrived late there was time for only one fiercely fought set, which Jane won by the skin of her teeth, as she expressed it.

"Don't go; you've only just come," pleaded Polly, as her friend put on her coat preparatory to making a dash down the winding hill in the gathering dusk. "Stay for supper, and Daddy will take you down when he goes to make his evening calls."

"I'd love to, but mother would worry. I must fly, for it's getting shadier every minute."

There was a certain sense of adventure in the air Jane felt as she ran lightly down the narrow path which she had trodden so many times during the summer. Always before this there had been so many with her that she had found small chance to think of anything but their gay, good-natured banter, but now she was strongly conscious of the stillness, the enveloping dusk, and the keen, salty breath of the ocean. It was not yet dark, but the lingering glow of the sunset made even the trees and bushes seem huge, unfamiliar things as she came upon them around the sudden curves of the path.

All at once she realized that she was nearing the place where the path from the "deep woods" met

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the hill-path. "Good! Now perhaps I shall meet Spinksy," she said to herself with a little feeling of relief. There was nothing to be afraid of, she knew. It was only that she was not used to being alone, and there was a strangeness about it which kept her from thinking of pleasanter things.

Not even the faintest murmur of boyish voices broke the silence as Jane stopped for an instant to listen, but before she could start on again, there was a low whimpering cry from the bushes, a sudden rush of tiny feet, and she stooped to pick up a mite of a dog shivering in the keen autumn air, and trying to caress this newly-found friend with his pink tongue.

Jane tucked the small trembling creature under her coat and felt all at once completely at ease again. "If you're a little bit scary about being alone it makes you feel all right to have something to take care of," she meditated, unconsciously discovering for herself a great truth. "You poor little thing, did you think you were lost, and are you frightened to death?"

The dog snuggled closer as though he understood the friendly words, and wanted to say that he was no longer afraid, and Jane stepped off quite gayly now, hardly conscious of the deepening twilight and the fact that she was alone. When she came within sight of the bayberry-candle house

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she began to feel as if she were nearly home. She was just assuring the small snuggling creature that very soon he should have a saucer of bread and milk, when the door of the house opened, a stream of light faintly illumined the path to the gate, and Jane saw the advancing figure of the girl whom she had noticed before.

She halted an instant involuntarily, then walked on hastily, hoping to pass before the girl reached the end of the path. Suddenly a breathless question flung after her made her stop and turn toward the speaker.

“Have you—have you seen a——” the other girl began in a queer, ungracious manner, and at the sound of her voice there was a convulsive wriggle, a sharp, anxious bark which made Jane uncover the little squirming dog and put him gently on the ground.

“So you had him; you were going to take him away! I might never have found him again!” exclaimed the newcomer, snatching the little creature from the ground and hugging him fiercely. “How could you take away the only thing that loves me!”

Jane, battling with her rising indignation, hardly knew what to say. It was sufficiently a blow to her pride to be suspected of doing anything underhand, but to be reproached for cruelty in almost

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the same breath was an added insult. Her first impulse was to turn and walk away without a word, but some deeper feeling kept her there. Underneath everything she was realizing that she had never come in contact with any one like this before: this girl whose pale, sharp-featured face looked out from a cloud of dark hair; whose somber, distrustful eyes seemed only windows for the unhappy soul within.

"I'm sorry you thought he was lost," Jane said with unusual gentleness. "He was sure of it, and he was awfully glad to see me. I was going to take him to my house and then try to find out where he lived." It was hard work to make an explanation which she knew to be so unnecessary, but something stronger than she compelled her.

"Oh," said the other girl without lifting her eyes from the small black head she was caressing. Then with a listless air, half apologetic, half indifferent, "Thank you very much for taking care of him."

"You're quite welcome," Jane responded, hoping that her words sounded as frostily polite as she meant them to be. She turned to go, but looked back involuntarily at the sound of a voice to see the old lady of the purple satin gown coming down the path. She was carrying a candle protected by

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a shade, and holding it so that it showed her plainly, but kept her from seeing anything herself.

“My dear, my dear Mary, where are you?” she questioned cheerfully. “I woke from my nap just in time to see you rush out of the house, and I tried to get up, but that blessed kitten had wound me up in my knittin’-work so’s I couldn’t stir a step. That little industrious thing must have been travelin’ round my chair for a full half hour. I hated to break my wool, and then after I did get free it took me ages to find a light I could bring outdoors. But here I am—that is, where am I and where are you?”

By this time the breathless old lady, holding the candle directly in front of her eyes, and completely blinded by its light, had talked herself quite out of the path and into the damp grass.

“Why, child, you shouldn’t be out here in this wet grass,” she cried, waving her candle around wildly and for a brief instant getting the two girls into focus. “Oh, there you are, aren’t you, and I’m the one that’s in the wet grass.” She said this last with a funny chuckling laugh which made Jane smile in spite of herself.

“Strange,” she continued, stepping cautiously toward them, “just for a minute, Mary, I saw double. I thought there were two of you. Now

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do tell me what made you run out of the house like that."

"I'd just found out that Peter was lost," answered Mary briefly. "And, Brownie, if you only won't put out your own eyes with that candle you'll see that there are two of us." There was a note of kindness in her voice, and in the way she took the old lady's arm to guide her to the path, which made her seem to Jane a little more endurable.

"Why, of course." The little old lady welcomed the extinguishing of the candle with a sigh of relief. "It isn't so very dark, is it? When I woke I thought it was the middle of the night. Oh, this is the nice girl I told you about, Mary. Won't you come in? We're so glad to have you call." She said the last with an appealing glance at the girl she called Mary, as though begging her sanction for the welcome.

"Thank you very much." Jane felt that the old lady's shy courtesy demanded her politest manner in return. "You see I just happened to find the dog. I must hurry home now because my mother will be anxious about me. Good-night." She couldn't help giving the old lady one of her cordial smiles, but she tried not to look into the girl's mournful eyes again.

"I don't care what's happened to her, she needn't be so—so horrid," she was thinking as she

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hurried away. She wouldn't allow herself to glance back, though she had the curious feeling that there might be a procession of interesting people coming down the path from the doorway of the bayberry-candle house.

Half-way home she encountered Donald evidently on the lookout for her. "Hello, little Cousin Jane. I said I'd come and meet you while David went for the mail," he explained. "And then we can all have supper, for which I'm thankful. It makes me perfectly ravenous to be out in this air, and fooling around with the other fellows."

Something in the hearty, youthful manner, in the glad atmosphere of the boy stirred Jane's memory. Not so many months ago he had been unhappy, and had looked at the world with strange, sorrowful eyes.

"Do you think, Don," she asked suddenly, "that if you have a house, and a perfectly darling dog, and a little plump, pink-and-white grandmother all tied up in her knitting, that even if you are unhappy you have a right to be rude and suspicious and—and generally hateful?"

"What under the sun, Jane Stuart," began Donald, stopping in the middle of the street to look at her searchingly. "I never heard of pink-and-white grandmothers tied up in their knitting.

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It ought to be stopped if any one's doing it to his grandmother. And I'm not rude and suspicious. Come in and eat your supper, girl, and you'll feel better."

Jane's laugh rang out as they went up the steps and into the house. "Foolish! You know I didn't mean you. Of course it might not have been her grandmother. After all why should she call her grandmother 'Brownie'? Perhaps it was her aunt."

Donald's hand closed over his cousin's wrist and drew her forcibly into the library, where her mother was sitting.

"Cousin Elizabeth, will you please attend to your daughter?" he said in pretended alarm. "I think she's delirious. Anyway, she's going on at a great rate about pink grandmothers and brown aunts, and I don't know how to stop her. Next thing I'll be a green cousin."

"Mother," began Jane, stopping to giggle over Donald's absurdity, "mother, when you see me getting desperately curious over any one again just say bayberry-candle girl, will you? I've met her for the first time, and I certainly hope it will be the last."

CHAPTER VII

A HOUSE-WARMING

THE invitations for the house-warming were out for Saturday, and during the week a good times atmosphere pervaded everything. Even Carol, who took school and lessons as a sort of penance, and secretly wondered how long she was going to be able to stand the dreadful regularity of her days, quite forgot to grumble, and surprised herself by getting the best weekly average she had so far achieved. This put her in such good humor that when she came out of school on Friday she felt in gracious mood toward even Rita Hastings and her set, and was entertaining a group of them when Jane Stuart ran down the school steps.

The listening girls were all laughing, and Jane hurried toward them, expecting to join in the fun. Carol, seeing her, finished her story abruptly, and with a gay good-bye to the others, steered her friend away from them and toward home.

"What were you telling them?" demanded Jane with some curiosity. She had caught the words "kidnap," "policemen," "blind," and the

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story sounded interesting. "Those girls seemed to think it was the funniest ever."

"Oh, only some of my nonsense," Carol answered quickly. "I love to tell things to those girls. They'll take in anything. Now you and—and David don't believe more than half I say, anyway."

"Why, yes, we do—that is we did at first. And we have to laugh at your stories, but ——" Jane waited so long that her friend grew impatient.

"But what?" she questioned sharply.

"Well, we'd get lots more fun out of them if we ever could know when you're telling the truth," admitted Jane with despairing bluntness.

"Oh, pooh, aren't they just as funny whether they're true or not? I never pretended that I don't dress them up sometimes. Let's not talk about me any longer. You've hurt my feelings terribly, Jane Stuart."

"Poor little Carol! I won't any more, but you really dragged it out of me, you know. What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Get my lessons for Monday. Now that's something I shouldn't expect you to believe, but I really am." Carol had changed in a second from pathos to sparkling good-humor. "I got the best average this week that I've had at all, and I'm going to try to keep it up. If you'd only work as

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hard as I do, Lady Jane, you might accomplish something."

"I believe I'll try," murmured Jane, quite as if she had never thought about it before, and then they both laughed and peace was fully restored.

"Mercy, gaze on those boys," Carol said, as both girls paused in front of the Stuart house just in time to see David and Donald rush out of the barn, closely followed by Kenneth and Rags. "You'd think something wonderful was going to happen, wouldn't you?"

"Spinksy's getting dreadfully independent of me," remarked Jane, following the boys with her eyes as they dashed across the street, vaulted the fence into a vacant lot and finally disappeared from view. "It's hardly worth while being a twin nowadays. I wouldn't change, though, if I could," she added hastily.

"I believe you. Well, good-bye, Lady Jane. Going up to Polly's to-morrow morning?"

"Don't see how I can. I've got a lot to do before the party—that is, there's always a great deal to do on Saturday mornings."

Jane congratulated herself as she went into the house because she had changed that last remark so neatly. Rob Randall had asked her not to mention to the other girls that he had begged her to make some cake for the house-warming. "Like

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those ripping cakes you brought over to the boys a few weeks ago," he had said. She had felt secretly much complimented when he added that he shouldn't ask any of the other girls, but the fellows needed a little help, and her cakes were such superfine, prize-package affairs.

She hung her hat and coat in the coat-closet under the stairs, and started to find mother, but a tap on the window beside the front door made her turn suddenly to see Rob's face peering through the glass.

"I saw you and Carol go by, so I came over with these," he began, holding out a berry-basket full of eggs as Jane opened the door. "My hens said it was pretty cheeky of me to ask you to make that cake, but they thought they could help out a little. The speckled hen felt particularly anxious, so she sent two."

Jane laughed as Rob pointed out the two top-most eggs on which was written, "Kindest regards of Mrs. Speckle."

"Robert Randall, you're still harping on that old joke. Why don't you get a new one?" she said with scorn. "I'm very much obliged for the eggs, though. I was wondering if I could coax Ken into letting me have some."

Rob started out of the door, but turned back again. "Perhaps I have a new joke on you," he

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ventured, looking as if he were not quite sure, but couldn't resist stirring her curiosity a little. "Perhaps I have—and then again, perhaps I haven't," he finished provokingly and was out of the door and down the path before Jane could stop him.

"You wretched boy, I think you might tell me what you mean," she called after him pleadingly, but she was talking to empty air, for by this time he had crossed the street and was vaulting the fence as the others had done.

"I've a great mind to go over and ask Mrs. Speckle," Jane threatened with a giggle. "Anyway I'm glad I've got the eggs, and I'll take 'em out to Susan right now."

She reached the kitchen at an exciting moment, for Miss Trot was just running to open the back door for Judy, who was coming in from the barn, crying at the top of her lungs and holding a cut hand so that the blood should not drip on her dress. With her came Mr. Chope, hovering about like a distracted old father bird, with his brown face screwed into distressful wrinkles.

Jane put down the eggs and flew to her sister. "Oh, Judy! Oh, your poor hand! I'll get mother, and she'll fix it for you."

"Mother isn't at home," wailed Judy. "I want Susan. She knows how."

"I'm coming, honey," Miss Trot called from the

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depths of the closet, and an instant later she was at Judy's side with some absorbent cotton and a neatly rolled bandage.

Jane and Mr. Chope watched while Susan bathed and worked over the afflicted hand with quick gentleness. Even Judy choked back her sobs and looked on with an air of modest pride when the bandage was skilfully adjusted.

Mr. Chope, who quite unnoticed by the others had been making up a most astounding variety of faces expressive of his sympathy and distress, drew a deep breath of relief when the end of the bandage was fastened by Susan's capable fingers.

"Wal, now," he began admiringly, "wal, now, that is a hand, ain't it? You won't touch that hateful old knife of mine agin, will you? It ain't meant for little delikit fingers like yourn."

"No-o," sighed Judy, looking as if a fresh burst of weeping were imminent. "I won't."

"Come on up-stairs," Jane proposed. "I'll let you use some of my paints if you like. I'll—I'll play a game with you." Which last offer was the height of heroism from Jane's point of view as Judy well knew.

"No," Judy responded with surprising resolution. "I'm getting too old to be a baby any more. I'll use your paints and play the game with you some other time, but now I'm going out into the

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yard again. Marcia Holt is there, and we were having a perfectly fascinating time until I cut myself."

Jane lingered after Judy had gone out-of-doors. "You did that just beautifully, Susan," she said with warm admiration in her tone. "Where did you learn how?"

"Oh, I haven't watched doctors for nothin'. And I love to fuss over people that are hurt or sick. I get quite a good deal of practice out of Kenneth and Judy, so your ma gave me some cotton and bandages to keep down here," explained Miss Trot simply.

"Why, you do it as well as a trained nurse," Jane went on, her appreciation growing the longer she thought about it.

"Do you really mean it?" Susan Trot's happy excitement made her black eyes sparkle, and brought forth the confidence she had been withholding. "Do you s'pose I could ever be one?" she finished almost in a whisper.

"One what? Oh, you mean a nurse. Susan, was that what you wouldn't tell me the other day?" Jane dropped into a chair by the kitchen table, and resting her chin in her hands gazed compellingly at the other girl.

"Yes," admitted Susan, the red in her cheeks growing brighter. "Yes, that was it. Ever sence

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that trained nurse was here last spring I've wanted to be like her. When Donald was so sick that the doctor thought he couldn't anyways get well she'd shut her mouth tight and everlastingly fight for him. I'd give anythin' to do that; jest make somebody live when every one thought he couldn't."

"Wouldn't it be splendid?" mused Jane, her gray eyes becoming dreamily soft. "Just imagine all the family giving up hope, and then you'd bend over the sick person for hours and days——"

"Golly, I bet she'd have a crick in her back," put in Kenneth, who was passing through the kitchen in search of his mother.

"For hours and hours at a time," reiterated Jane, gazing sternly at her younger brother, "and by and by she'd look up at you with a—a trustful smile, and then drop off into a sound sleep. After that, of course, every one would want Miss Trot for a nurse." Using the funny little name so seriously invested it with new dignity for Jane, and for the girl listening with such intensity that she seemed scarcely to breathe.

Suddenly she caught her breath quickly, and swung away from the table where she had been sitting. "It sounds awful nice," she said in a stifled voice, "but I never could do it—never."

"Why not, Susan? Why couldn't you learn to

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be a nurse when you're so splendid about it already?" Jane was too much pleased with the glowing vision she had evoked to give it up lightly.

"The nurse that was here said that you had to know a lot before you could even begin to train," answered Miss Trot dejectedly. "I mean that you'd have to have more schoolin' than I've had or ever can have."

"I'll teach you all I know," Jane declared impulsively. "I've been meaning to tell you so ever since we spoke about it before. You know you promised to give me some lessons in cooking, and it's only fair for us to exchange."

Miss Trot gazed at her with a dawning happiness in her face. "We'll have to ask your ma first of all," she said, coming back to her practical self, though the fires of ambition were once more alight in the dark eyes.

"Of course; and she'll help us plan about it. Probably mother can find out from Dr. Reed about the different hospitals and what you have to know." Jane's mind leaped ahead of the present moment with its usual quickness. "Anyway, let's begin next week. You can be thinking ahead what you will teach me to cook on Saturday morning."

As Jane left the room the other girl looked after

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her with adoring eyes. "Everybody has their 'outs,'" she said to herself thoughtfully, "but she has lots more 'ins' than most folks. I'd have to learn how to make that there ambrosy and neck-tie Mr. Chope is always talkin' about to know anythin' that's nice enough to match up to her." Which was certainly a great concession on the part of Miss Trot, who never failed to treat Mr. Chope's mythological flights with a scorn she took no pains to conceal.

Jane's sponge cakes were again a shining success, and she felt a pardonable pride when she handed them to Rob Saturday noon.

"Now do be careful," she implored. "My heart would be quite broken if those went flying through the air."

"I can't imagine what you're hinting at." Rob was grinning broadly over the memory Jane's words had evoked. "But I'll handle them as though they were spun glass. It's perfectly dandy of you to make 'em. Don't you—don't you think I ought to sample one before I start, so's to see if they're up to our standard?"

"No, I don't," Jane answered disappointingly. "Nothing would induce me to unpack those, and I haven't even one left that I could give you."

"All right." Rob's face and voice were meekly

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resigned. "Of course I shall eat them for your sake, whether they're good or not, but I thought the other boys might like to get my opinion before they tried anything so risky."

"I hate to laugh at you when you're so foolish." Jane was trying hard to look severely stern. "I don't see why Spinksy and Don didn't take these cakes over. I saw them go off about a quarter of an hour ago, and they didn't have so very much to carry."

"Oh, they were going to get ——" began Rob unguardedly, but he stopped suddenly and made such a successful pretense of dropping the cakes that Jane's heart was in her mouth, and she forgot to press the question about her twin.

"Well, see you later," Rob said somewhat hastily. "Oh, by the way, I suppose you know that we invited Rita Hastings? We don't stand for the crowd that she goes with now, but we can't very well leave her out. You see our mothers have known her mother forever, and Rita always has been at our parties."

"Of course. You needn't apologize to me. I get along well enough with her, but I can't say I'm fond of her. She and Carol usually manage to rub each other the wrong way, though."

"We'll try to keep 'em too busy this time," Rob remarked philosophically as he started down the

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path. "Be sure to wear thick shoes and bring a sweater," he advised. "You know this party is going to last into the evening."

Jane laughed. "You're the third boy who's told me that this morning," she called after him gleefully. "If I get cold it'll be my own fault."

By previous agreement the girls were to meet at Jane's house at three o'clock. Mrs. Stuart, who had been urged by the Snowshoe Club to be their perpetual chaperone, was going with them this afternoon, though she had not yet consented to accept permanently this position of honor. Much to their own joy Judy and Kenneth were also invited, which, as the latter said, made things easier for him, because he should have gone anyway.

Carol arrived first, for a wonder, and almost on her heels came the Triad with Rita Hastings accompanying. The latter was in one of her really pleasant moods, and even Polly was gurgling with laughter over something Rita had been telling.

"Mollyolly telephoned that she is sorry to keep you waiting, and she and Esther and Marian will be along very soon," Serena explained to Mrs. Stuart.

"Perhaps Marian can't find her thick shoes and a sweater," commented Peggy. "She's always losing her belongings, and every boy we've seen this morning has made us promise to bring warm

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things. What do you suppose we're going to do?"

"Hunt for the North Pole, probably," Polly suggested, and at this Kenneth, who had been unusually shy and quiet, went off into one of his mirthful laughs.

"O-ho, I should say not," he remarked with the air of one who knows. "I guess Mr. Chope and I haven't collected ——" something in the eagerness with which the girls all turned toward him made him realize what he was doing, and he shut his mouth decidedly, and put both hands over it as though afraid information would leak out in spite of him.

"Ken, dear, please let me walk with you," begged Carol, going across the room to him and putting on her most coaxing manner. To the joy of every one Kenneth dodged wildly, and sought the shelter of his mother.

"No, you don't, Carol," he said firmly. "I'm going to walk with mother. She never teases me to tell secrets."

"That's one on you, Carol," laughed Jane, starting out of the room to open the door for Molly and the other girls.

"You can't always do what you want, can you, little Miss Carol?" remarked Rita in her patronizing way. "Oh, have you told the girls that per-

Jane Stuart's Chum

fectly lovely adventure you were telling us after school yesterday? You know what I mean, when you tried to make the man ——”

“No, I haven't,” Carol interrupted almost rudely, looking involuntarily to see if Jane were within hearing. “And, what's more, I'm not going to tell it.” She wheeled about as she ended, and crossed the room with the very evident intention of avoiding Rita, a move which that young person was not slow to comprehend.

“Rita will get even with Carol for that,” Polly murmured in Serena's ear, and then all the girls clustered around the late arrivals who had just come into the room.

“It was my fault, of course,” Marian Chester was explaining pathetically. “The boys said I couldn't be admitted if I didn't bring rubbers, and they 'specially wanted me, of course, on account of the ——” She stopped with a little gasp and looked about her, then went on hastily, “Well, when I came to hunt for them, the rubbers, I mean, not the boys, I couldn't find mates, and finally I had to come with one tan rubber and one black one, and they're both for the same foot.”

The gently resigned air with which she finished made the girls laugh and forget that she was the culprit who had kept them waiting.

“Why don't you have your property tied to



THEY CROSSED THE NARROW BRIDGE

A House-Warming

you?" remarked Molly Oliver, who as Marian's next door neighbor had frequent experiences of this kind. "It's too bad we've made you and the girls late, Mrs. Stuart."

"If we walk fast now we shall be there in time." Mrs. Stuart led the way as she spoke, and the others trooped after her. Kenneth, as the only man in the party, took the head of the straggling column, and led the chattering, laughing girls with an impressive dignity which they forbore to remark upon.

It was one of those October afternoons which seem still to be held in summer's regretful clasp. As they crossed the narrow bridge and entered the wood path which led directly to the little house, the sunshine peered between the trees, and fell in a shower of gold in the clear spaces. The oak-trees were aglow with somber fire; the evergreens wore myriad shades of green and brown. In the near distance the windows of the little house, touched by the sunlight, glittered like diamonds.

"There's Davy," shrieked Judy, and at the sound of her voice David whistled shrilly, and several of the other boys came tumbling out of the house and ran to meet their approaching guests.

"Children, we thought you were never coming," said Jack Dexter, taking possession of the zither which Serena had been urged to bring.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Girls are always late," remarked Stanley Oliver, with a suspicious eye on his next door neighbor which she tried unsuccessfully to ignore.

"Well, you needn't scold, now we have come. And, anyway, if you hadn't been so particular about rubbers ——" Molly's hand extinguished the prolonged description which Marian would have given had she been allowed.

"Thank you for shutting that off, Molly," Rob observed feelingly. "We've all been so busy that we haven't had any lunch, and if I had to wait to hear why Marian couldn't find two rubbers of the same kind I wouldn't answer for the consequences."

"Why, how did you know?" began Marian wonderingly.

"Didn't know. Just guessed," Rob responded with a satisfied chuckle. "And now, girls, hustle, please, and let your starving little friends have a chance at the bounteous lunch they have prepared for you."

"Chaperone first, young ladies," said Jack reprovingly, "and please don't mind if we ask you to use the side door this time."

The little room which they were entering was so essentially boyish that one would hardly need to be told by whom it was planned and arranged. Pictures of baseball teams and boat races decorated the walls, school-banners added their bright colors,

A House-Warming

and from over the door a deer's head gazed mildly down upon the gay young people. Bats and balls, tennis racquets, Indian clubs, and snowshoes were all suggestive of health, muscular prowess, and out-of-door good times. Though the furniture was scanty it did not matter, for stout hooks showed where a hammock could be swung, and the somewhat worn-looking couch looked invitingly big and comfortable.

"What a jolly room," proclaimed Jane, drawing a long breath of satisfaction after her critical inspection. "All you need is a chair or two, and a lot more cushions, and an Indian blanket."

"Why, Jane," expostulated Mrs. Stuart, smiling in spite of herself at her daughter's absorption, "why, Jane, you forget you're a guest, and that you haven't been invited to criticize."

Jane came to herself with a start and looked blankly at her mother for an instant. Then the color flew into her cheeks and she tried vainly to repress her obstinate dimple. "I apologize—I apologize," she cried, sweeping her hosts a grand bow. "Spinksy likes to have me criticize and—I forgot you weren't all my brothers."

"Your apology is accepted," said Jack.

"And sofa-pillows will be, too, if any come our way," added Rob. "We shouldn't even refuse an Indian blanket."

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Goodness, do you think we're made of money?" Polly's voice sounded positively scared. "I think I might be equal to a cushion—but an Indian blanket. Glory!"

"I move we let 'em off on the blanket," Rob conceded magnanimously. "But say, girls, we really think you ought to do something for a struggling institution like this."

"Not after what you announced up at Polly's a few weeks ago," Peggy declared sharply. "You said this was your house, and we girls weren't to have anything to do about it."

"Except to add 'destructive touches.' Wasn't that it, David?" Carol always took a malicious pleasure in turning the gaze of the assembled company on David, who usually let the other boys do the talking.

"They can do that all right," put in Stanley Oliver, before David could think of a suitable retort. "Girls are ——"

"That's enough, son." Jack Dexter suppressed further remarks with a muzzling arm around the last speaker's neck.

"Good gracious, Stan, what do you think you're doing?" added Rob in an alarmed voice. "Don't you know you ought not to irritate our guests when there's nine of them to only six of us—not counting the chaperone."

A House-Warming

"Dear me! Why didn't three of us have the strength of mind to refuse?" said Molly Oliver. "I call for volunteers to go home."

"Just hear them struggle for first place," David murmured, when a dead silence followed Molly's words.

"Of course, we don't want to go home," Jane cried impetuously. "Nothing could hire me. I'm pining to see more of this cute little house, and I'm as hungry as Rob said he was, and—why, where are Donald and Ned Holt?"

"Have you just missed us?" inquired Donald himself reproachfully. He had opened the door from the next room, quite unnoticed by Jane, just as she began to speak. "Ned and I have been putting on the finishing touches. And supper is all ready. Cousin Elizabeth, will you come, please?" Donald crossed the room and offered his arm to Mrs. Stuart with an unconscious grace of manner which made some of the other boys stare. Stanley Oliver looked after him with a little frown. He had not yet decided whether he wholly approved of this newest member of the Snowshoe Club, who appeared to take school and boyish fun as special privileges, and actually seemed to like his teachers. Which last, from Stanley's point of view, was enough to put any boy under suspicion of being too good to be true.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"All the girls please shut their eyes until I count three," said Rob Randall, seized with a sudden inspiration just as Mrs. Stuart was entering the next room. "Now, one—Carol, you're peeking; I can see your eyes shine. Two—please excuse the gentleman guests invited by the club if they don't rise from their chairs. Three-e."

With one impulse the girls opened their eyes and looked straight at the long table standing in the center of the big room. There was an instant of astonished silence. Then a burst of delighted laughter that made the glasses on the table ring in response.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SNOWSHOE SISTERS

At any other time the girls would have been quick to exclaim over the fireplace, capacious enough for small logs, at the bookshelves, already holding some of the books young people love, over the small tables where magazines and games promised entertainment. For the first moment, however, they could see nothing but the four gentlemanly figures which sat, two on each side of the long table, waiting with supreme patience for the arrival of the other guests. The boys had done their best to make them realistic instead of wholly grotesque, and there was something so uncannily lifelike about them that for an instant the girls hovered about the doorway without venturing nearer.

Then Jane made a dart for the nearest one, only to be headed off by Rob, who was waiting for a chance to speak. "Just a minute, Lady Jane," he said reprovingly. "You must wait to be introduced before you interview strangers too rashly.

"You see," he explained, "we know that host-

Jane Stuart's Chum

esses are always particular to have their tables properly balanced. So, as the Snowshoe Club is a little shy on boys just now, and we didn't particularly want to invite any real boys until we had decided on some new members, why—why, we just had to manufacture some." The speaker looked upon the assembled company with his pleasant twinkling smile, and then gazed with pardonable pride at the masterpieces which he had helped to construct.

"We will now introduce the gentlemen to the ladies whose escorts they are to be," began Ned Holt in the most ceremonious manner he could assume. "Miss Strong, may I present to you Mr. Byron Dryden Pope, whose beautiful poems you have probably read over and over."

Esther, amiable as ever, and quite used to being the butt of good-natured fun, looked from one curious figure to another with a puzzled expression in her short-sighted eyes. At last her gaze rested on the thin, dark-haired youth nearest her. His hair rolled back in waves from an extremely high forehead, and his dark eyes had an upward, soulful glance. "I see my fate," she said with a laugh. "I'll go and commune with him."

"Hurrah for Esther. She hit it right the first time; which is a great compliment to us, hey, boys?" said David, rushing to straighten Mr. B.

The Snowshoe Sisters

Dryden Pope, who, now that he was discovered, showed an alarming tendency to lop over on the table.

"Miss Heath, allow me to present Mr. Claude Algernon Montmorency, one of the 'Four Hundred,'" said Donald Lee. "He begs you to excuse him for not rising. He is made to sit."

Carol's pout and her bubbling laugh came almost at the same minute. "I never could endure a man with a monocle, but I suppose I'll have to be polite and take him," she protested, walking with unerring judgment straight to the figure in a dress-suit and immaculate shirt-front. "I thought it wasn't proper, though, for gentlemen to appear in evening-dress until after six o'clock," she added slyly.

"You're too particular," scolded David. "That was the only suit we could beg that would absolutely show that he is a shining member of high society."

"Miss Mollyolly Oliver," began Jack, turning with a wave of the hand to one of the two remaining figures, a young man whose rather wobbly-looking arm-muscles stuck out conspicuously, "permit me to introduce Discus Sprint Vaulter who holds the international record in several sports."

Molly sat down on the nearest chair and laughed

Jane Stuart's Chum

immoderately, while the athlete, assisted by David, shakily raised one knobby arm and searched the air for her hand.

"Come on, Molly," urged David. "He'd say, 'Put it there,' only he lost his voice at the last track-meet. He's heard about how smart you are at tennis and basket-ball, and he wants to meet you."

"The one that's left is the realest one of all," said Jane, as Molly went to sit beside her cavalier. The afternoon light had faded perceptibly by now, and, as Jane said, the figure at the far end of the table was astonishingly lifelike. "I hope I get him."

"Jane," said Rob, putting on a frown, and stifling a laugh at the same moment, "Jane, you're too grasping. In spite of—of your selfishness, though, I'm forced to admit that this gentleman with the carefully disarranged hair and the floating necktie——" Rob hesitated so long and grew so red in the face that Jane looked at him in amazement, and in her absorption failed to see that Ned was apparently leaning on Jack's shoulder, that Donald had turned his back, and that David and Kenneth were shaking with noiseless laughter.

"This gentleman," began Rob again, recovering his self-control by a mighty effort, and talking as fast as he could, "is the artist you've been looking for. Miss Jane Stuart, may I introduce Rembrandt

The Snowshoe Sisters

Rubens Van Dyck. He is anxious to talk about pictures with you."

"Mr. Van Dyck, I'm just charmed to meet you." Jane advanced with outstretched hand and her most confident smile. To her and David dressing-up was second-nature, and it was a perfect joy to carry on this game of the imagination which the boys had begun.

"You paint so wonderfully," she continued, assuming, to the delight of her twin, her grandest manner. "I am more than pleased to have the chance to tell you"—Jane hesitated, and involuntarily took a step backward. Had the stiff-looking figure with its painted face and tumbled wig really swayed a little in its chair, or was it only a trick of her eyes?—"to tell you how much I have enjoyed your pictures," she finished with less assurance.

Then in sudden panic and with a little startled cry she backed away from the table, looking so pale that David's laughter stopped at once, and he edged up to her and patted her shoulder comfortingly. "It's—it's alive," she murmured, and then her voice died in her throat as with fascinated gaze she watched Mr. Rembrandt Rubens Van Dyck rise from his chair unaided, and cast from his closely cropped fair hair the untidy wig. The paint which accentuated his own ruddy coloring made

Jane Stuart's Chum

the earnestness of his expression and manner almost ludicrous, yet no one felt inclined to laugh at him when impetuous speech poured forth.

"Miss Jane Stuart, and—and the other ladies, will you please to forgive me," he said so penitently that all the girls forgave him at once, though no one knew for what. "I should not have let these mischievous boys persuade me to play a trick on you. I did not dream that any one would be startled."

"Mrs. Stuart, this is Mr. Prescott, and it's not his fault at all," apologized Rob. "He came to see father about—well, on business, and I asked him to come to our party. We were going to have four dummies, but David hit upon this, and we all thought it was such a lark that we wouldn't let Mr. Prescott say no."

"Spinksy!" cried Jane with an emphasis which meant getting even as soon as possible. The color had come back to her cheeks and her eyes were sparkling. "Anyway, I think it was an awfully good joke on me. I was so sure I was playing up to you in my best manner, and I couldn't understand"—Jane's mirthful laugh interrupted her in the middle of a sentence—"I could not understand why Rob thought he was so much funnier than any of the others had been."

Every one laughed, and in the momentary silence

The Snowshoe Sisters

which followed Judy's voice rose with a distinctness which she had not intended.

"Aren't they ever going to have supper, mother? They keep laughing and laughing."

"Right you are, Judy." Ned Holt caught her up and swung her into a chair at one end of the table. "Mrs. Stuart, will you sit beside Judy, please, and Ken is going to hold down the other end of the table with Rob. You'll all find place-cards."

"If you please, Robert, I should like to wash my face," said Jane's artist. Then, turning apologetically to Mrs. Stuart, he added, "Miss Dexter has insisted upon painting me also when she has given the finishing touches to the—the other gentlemen."

"What's his name, Jane?" asked Serena, as Rob disappeared into the next room with the stranger. The latter's empty chair was between them as they settled into their seats in obedience to the place-cards.

"Prescott, or something like that," responded Jane vaguely. "I was so embarrassed I can't be sure of anything. Ask Jack."

But Jack, sitting on the other side of Serena, was absorbed in lighting the lamp under the chafing-dish which stood in front of Marian, and didn't even hear Serena's question.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"I do believe Marian is going to make 'shrimp wiggle,'" said Jane perplexedly. "I thought the boys were boasting about getting up this supper all by themselves. Why, Serena," this after a prolonged survey of the delicacies which the table afforded, "those cunning rolls certainly look like yours, and I should know Polly's fudge if I met it on the Desert of Sahara."

"They are mine," began Serena, and then stopped to listen to Peggy who was saying in her critical, excited way, "Ned Holt, you let me think that I was the only girl you were going to ask to do anything."

"I said you were the only girl I was going to ask for cake," Ned remarked calmly. He was busily engaged in serving cold chicken, and Peggy's protest failed to make him look away from this absorbing occupation for a single instant. "You were, but that didn't keep me from begging Esther for her specialty. I didn't want her to think she was neglected, and, besides, no one else makes such eat-all-you-can potato salad as she does."

"And David Stuart made me feel that it wouldn't be proper for me to contribute a glass bowl and cups unless I made a fruit lemonade to go with them," said Carol severely. "Of course they didn't need it, but it would make my gift so much more

The Snowshoe Sisters

complete, etc., etc. Entirely on my account, wasn't it? David, you're a fraud."

"Who's scolding Davy?" demanded Rob, coming back with his friend, very rosy and smiling now, and insisting upon another apology to Mrs. Stuart before he seated himself between Jane and Serena.

"Rob, was this the joke on me you meant?" Jane demanded while the stranger was still at the other end of the table, "or was it about Mr.—Mr. ——"

"Prescott," supplied Rob, looking guilty at once, but trying to conceal it. "Let me see—what is this joke you're talking about?"

"As if you didn't know." Jane's scorn was crushing. "You ridiculous thing, you made me think I was the only one who was going to be asked to cook anything for your old supper, and I fell into the trap like a lamb and was as proud as a peacock."

"Well, but Mrs. Janes," pleaded Rob, trying to put on an expression of injured innocence, "it wasn't my fault if you felt like a whole menagerie. Besides, I didn't ask another soul to do anything."

"No, you left that for the other boys," Jane retorted. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Serena cooked the chicken as well as made those scrumptious little rolls, and with my own eyes I can see

Jane Stuart's Chum

Molly's stuffed dates, and Rita's salted nuts. I more than half believe that you've hidden a freezer full of Polly's ice-cream somewhere."

"How did you guess it? Aren't you sorry?" Rob asked solemnly. Then as Mr. Prescott sat down next to Jane, he added, "Well, anyway, we provided some things for this supper, didn't we, boys?"

"Sure thing," David responded. "Salt and butter—and—and water."

"Tables—chairs and paper napkins," enumerated Donald.

"Mercy! Do we have to eat those?" Carol expostulated in a plaintive tone. "I shall make my Reginald—Percy—oh, what is his name—eat my share of the furniture. Chairs and paper napkins always give me bad dreams."

"Jiminy crickets, Carol, don't say anything so witty as that again," begged Rob, turning to thump Kenneth, who, in his joy at Carol's remark, had choked over a biscuit. "We don't give any life insurance policies with this supper, but we should hate to have poor Ken knocked out in the first round."

"Oh, I like to have people be funny when I eat," gasped Kenneth, still alarmingly red and watery-eyed. "When—when I laugh I can eat more."

"Give him some more shrimp wiggle. I bet

The Snowshoe Sisters

that's the best you ever made, Marian," said Stanley Oliver, tasting critically, and looking at the flushed cook with unwonted approval.

"Well, if you can find anything better than Serena's chicken and biscuits and this potato salad of Esther's, I should like to know about it." Jack's emphatic manner was distinctly impressive.

"I can taste five different kinds of fruit in this lemonade," David remarked meditatively. "There's nothing stingy about Carol."

"That isn't a compliment, David Stuart," protested Carol with a worried air. "They ought to be so mixed and—and blended that you taste just a delicious, mysterious-something, and you can't tell ——"

"I get her." David hastily drank again, and smacked his lips appreciatively. "I couldn't guess in a thousand years what that taste is, but it's the best ever."

"I really feel," observed Serena, after a comprehensive survey of the table from which most of the food had disappeared, "that we girls provided a great deal of this supper."

"Well, what if you did?" retorted Ned with brotherly candor. "Aren't there more of you to eat it?"

"My Discus has a frightful appetite." Molly regarded the muscular figure beside her with fond

Jane Stuart's Chum

pride. "He looks as if he could eat everything on the table."

"He has some style about him," Esther said with a worried air. "Byron Dryden Pope keeps trying to put his head in his plate, and it isn't good manners."

"You see, girls," remarked Rob, "considering what we have said about this club-house being entirely for the boys, we felt just a little—well, a little bashful about asking you right out to provide the supper for us."

"Strange, I can't understand it," murmured Polly, who had been unusually quiet.

"So we furnished all the really important things like mustard and olives and crackers and cheese." It was Donald continuing the story now with a happiness in his eyes and smile that made the almost-persuaded Perpetual Chaperone watch him with delight. "And then we called on you girls for the trifling things that help fill up the table."

"Trifles!" groaned Jane. "If you say anything like that again, I shall put my head in my plate the way B. D. Pope does. Now, Mr. Prescott," she added, turning eagerly to the young man beside her, "I'll leave it to you. Don't you think we girls ought to have a share in this house when the boys depend on us to provide their spreads?"

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"Surely, I do," Mr. Prescott agreed earnestly. "My sister and I, we like to share all things that we haf. We work together and we play together."

For the first time Jane noticed the slight foreign accent in the stranger's speech and wondered a little. Then her attention was distracted by a remark from Stanley who was sitting opposite them.

"Girls want everything nowadays," he grumbled. "Catch us teasing to belong to your club."

"How are the Ninepins getting along?" inquired Rob. "Any initiations yet to fill the vacancies?"

"No," said Molly, giving him a swift frown which was intended to tell him that the girls didn't talk about this before Rita. "We haven't started in on any meetings yet, and I don't know when we shall."

"I found out something to-day that I bet you'd all like to hear," remarked Stanley, who loved to be mysterious and important.

"Tell us. We know you're dying to," Polly said promptly.

Stanley shook his head, kept a dignified silence for a moment, and then, realizing that he was not going to be teased for his information, came out with it.

"Mr. Wells is going to leave," he said sulkily.

The effect was all he could have desired, for Mr.

Jane Stuart's Chum

Wells, who had taught the fathers and mothers of some of these girls and boys, was so beloved, and so identified with the Belhaven High School that no one could think of that institution without him.

"How perfectly dreadful! Why?" asked Marian excitedly.

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose it's because the committee think he's too old. Anyway, they're talking about having some young man take his place."

"What a shame!" began Peggy. "Doesn't Mr. Wells feel perfectly heart-broken over it?"

"You bet he does." Stanley knew nothing about Mr. Wells' feelings, but he felt that a statement so indefinite as this could never be brought up against him. "Some of us fellows," he hinted darkly, "are going to make it warm for any one who tries to take his place." As he finished speaking he encountered the clear, penetrating gaze of Mr. Prescott, who had so much the air of wanting to ask a question that Stanley stared at him involuntarily. Something about the kindly, puzzled eyes made him rather ashamed of his last remark and he looked away with a little frown.

"Anyway, I think it's darned mean to put out a man because he's old," he muttered.

"It would be if they did," answered Rob

The Snowshoe Sisters

quickly, and every one stopped talking to listen to his opinion, because Mr. Randall was chairman of the school-committee, and Rob ought to know if any one did. "If Mr. Wells is going to leave, and, mind you, I don't say that he is, it's because he wants to go. And now, ladies and gentlemen," he rose from his chair and rapped on the table in his most presidential manner, "will you please keep quiet for a while? Our esteemed fellow-citizen, Mr. Ned Holt, wishes to make a speech."

There was a prolonged burst of applause, which caused Rita to remark in an audible tone that when people were well-fed you could please them with anything. Then Ned rose to his feet.

"Of course you all know," he began with an admirable directness, "that we couldn't have had this house if it hadn't been for Mr. Eliot. In the first place he was going to have it built for himself and let us use it when he didn't need it. Then last summer he got interested in our club, and he decided to have a camp somewhere else, and to let us fix this up just as we pleased. And you girls, at least," Ned was growing more earnest as he proceeded, "have no idea how he helped us out in the things we wanted to do. He hired a carpenter to show us how to build the thing right, and he insisted upon our having that dandy fireplace. Then he was awfully uneasy when we

Jane Stuart's Chum

talked about using kerosene lamps, and he didn't rest until he had found out that we could have electric wires brought over from near Mr. Trent's house. I can't begin to tell you how fine he was about it all. And we elected him honorary president of the Snowshoe Club, and now I propose his health." Ned finished abruptly with his glass in his hand, and the others drank the toast with great eagerness, for each girl and boy of them was fond of Mr. Eliot.

"You don't know our Uncle Stephen, do you, Mr. Prescott?" said Jane softly. "I wish you did. He's so splendid. Perhaps you will some time."

"Mr. Toastmaster," began Donald Lee, "may I propose another honorary member and a toast?" He spoke very fast as if afraid that his courage might fail him if he hesitated.

"Go ahead, old fellow," said Rob with cheering informality.

"I know that you have said a good deal about this club being only for boys ——"

"Mercy, do you suppose he's going to propose a girl?" ventured Marian with quite intentional clearness. "I'm all of a twitter."

"It's your shrimp wiggle. They can't get along without that," Carol murmured.

"Girls, girls, don't be foolish and embarrass the speaker." The toastmaster looked at them se-

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verely and rapped on the table with his knife handle.

"I was going to say," continued Donald, who, not yet fully initiated into this gay girl and boy chatter, felt a little helpless, "that I thought it would be nice to make Cousin Elizabeth—I mean Mrs. Stuart—an honorary member and drink her health."

"Of course. We don't need to ballot for it. It's a unanimous vote. And we all hope that she will decide to be our perpetual chaperone." Rob was on his feet in a second with his glass held high, and to Jane's joy all the boys rose and turned to the end of the table where Mrs. Stuart was sitting.

"My Algernon Claude won't move a muscle," grumbled Carol, trying her best to set the genteel youth beside her on his feet. "He has no better manners than your poet, Esther."

"Sh," whispered Polly softly, for Mrs. Stuart, looking very small beside those tall girls and boys, and very pretty, her own two children thought, was rising from her chair.

"It's nice of you to make me an honorary member and to drink my health," she said simply. "And I'm so pleased to have you want me for a perpetual chaperone that I've quite made up my mind to accept the position, with the understand-

Jane Stuart's Chum

ing that I shall be with you myself or provide a suitable substitute. And now may I drink to the Snowshoe Club, with my congratulations upon its progressive and broad-minded ideas."

There was a twinkle in Mrs. Stuart's brown eyes, a significance in the smile with which she ended, which made Jane feel at once that mother knew something which she herself had not been told, and this impression was confirmed by the meaning way in which the boys looked at each other and laughed. For the first time she realized clearly that her twin was deep in a mystery which he had been quite able to keep from her, and even in the midst of a good time the knowledge gave her a little pang. "I suppose from now on Spinksy will get more and more chummy with those boys, and we shall be like any other brother and sister," she said to herself rather gloomily.

"What under the sun are you thinking about, Lady Jane?" demanded Rob, who was getting to his feet with a paper in his hand. "Do seem a little more cheerful when I'm just going to read a toast to the girls.

"You will all feel sure that this poem was written by a real poet," he continued, looking as serious as his altogether cheerful countenance would permit. "There is no name signed to it. It may perhaps be the work of the blushing

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young man sitting beside Esther. I refer to Mr. B. D. Pope, and I trust that he will not disclaim the authorship of this gem." Rob waited for an instant with his eye fixed anxiously on the lippy poet. "He does not deny it," he proclaimed with absurd joyousness. "I will read.

"To leave out the ladies would surely not do,
And so, Snowshoe Sisters, we're now toasting you.
When our needs were the greatest you came to our aid,
Without you our banquet would fail, I'm afraid.
For though we were sure that we could do it all,
We felt much relieved when you came at our call,
And did those small things which, we hasten to say,
Mean so much to us boys on this house-warming day.
We offer you then our best thanks, and yet more,
The key to a locker, a key to the door.
You may come here for rest, you may come here for fun,
You may come in a storm or come in the sun ;
You may hold your club meetings, talk, read, sew or play.
Each Friday is yours, and what more can we say?"

There was an instant of mystified silence on the part of the girls when Rob finished, then two or three started to speak at once. Finally out of the momentary confusion David's voice came clearly.

"Hurrah for the Snowshoe Sisters," he exclaimed, waving his wisp of a paper napkin and nodding wildly at his mother. Then, as the other boys took up the cheer, Mrs. Stuart rose from the table and led the way into the third room of the house.

CHAPTER IX

THE BONFIRE

"STEP lively, girls," Ned called from somewhere in the rear, "and let all the Snowshoe Sisters get into their den."

"Do you mean to say this splendiferous room really belongs to us?" demanded Polly, gazing around her with a wide-eyed stare. "Girls, those are real lockers. There's a name over each one, I do believe." She was down on her knees in a second searching for her own property.

"What a gorgeous big, round table," observed Carol, "and will you look at that fireplace just waiting for a match."

"Each of us has a key ring with two keys on it." Polly was rising from her investigation of the lockers, and she waved her own keys in triumphant proof. "Isn't that the completest thing?"

"Girls, this is one on us," Jane remarked with unusual seriousness. "I shall have an everlasting pain in my conscience when I look at that Indian blanket on the couch, and those cushions.

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They might just as well have taken those themselves. And we were so afraid we shouldn't get credit enough for cooking the supper."

"Sh!" warned David solemnly. "Don't say anything, boys, and she'll keep on working herself up until she'll propose washing the dishes."

"Oh, not all those," Jane protested weakly. "I'd most rather not belong to ——"

"You don't have to wash 'em," Jack reassured her. "We've engaged Mrs. Trent to come over later, and make everything spick and span."

"We've taken such pains with this dear little room," began Rob in a voice artfully intended to work upon the feelings of the lady guests. "We've worked so hard over it that we shall be awfully sorry if you don't like it well enough to make up for the cooking you did for us."

"Pile on the agony," suggested Stanley, but a moan from Marian interrupted him, and every one turned to look at her as she plumped down in a chair and clutched her auburn locks with both hands.

"Do you smell anything burning?" she asked anxiously. "I've always known that if any one was better to me than I deserve my hair would—would have—what do you call it—spontaneous combustion."

"She thinks it is a disease," Ned remarked in a

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solemn undertone. "Never you mind, Marian. That shrimp wiggle deserves all we can do for you."

"And if you get on fire we'll put you out—of the house," added Stanley.

"Girls, see this love of a corner cupboard." Molly Oliver, who had been making a systematic tour of observation, stood lost in admiration before this latest discovery. "I'm going to bring over some cups and saucers, and we can make chocolate. Couldn't you plan to come every Friday afternoon, Mrs. Perpetual Chaperone, and have fun with us?" she petitioned, dropping down on the couch beside Mrs. Stuart.

"Do, Mother Stuart." Carol, who always claimed a share in Jane's mother, crowded in on the other side, thereby dislodging Polly and Serena, to their outspoken disgust.

Mrs. Stuart laughed. "I'm quite sure I can if there's anything left of me," she said happily. It was satisfyingly characteristic of her to agree without demur to anything she thought possible. "I've been planning to take my Friday afternoon walks in this direction, and I'm glad to be urged."

"You must spend part of the time with us," clamored two of the boys at the same moment.

"You've promised to teach Jack and me chess," added Ned Holt.

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"Why go home at all, mother?" David questioned with calm sarcasm. "Of course we don't need you."

Mrs. Stuart smiled. "I'll consider your advice, Mr. David Stuart. Perhaps it would be a good ——"

Kenneth's sturdy arms flung around her waist cut short her remark. "Oh, mother, Davy didn't mean that the least bit in the world," he began anxiously. "You know Judy and I aren't Snowshoe Clubbers," and then, noticing the amused faces around him, he tried to slide away out of sight, only to be stopped by Rob.

"Say we make 'em both honoraries," the latter proposed. "Ken has really done a lot, and he never told a word."

"I'll be a messenger boy." Kenneth, whose present fancy rather inclined to that as a profession, felt his spirits rise. "Can't you sew some brass buttons on me, mother?"

"I could be chief nurse," suggested Judy. "Don't you remember how nicely I tied up your finger when you hammered it the other day, Rob? And if there's anything I don't know I'll ask Susan."

"Good for you. Let's make it unanimous, boys. All in favor please stand. It is a vote. There, now you're both honorary clubbers," fin-

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ished Rob, dropping his presidential manner at once. "Hello! What's all this?"

The commotion at the door resolved itself into David, who, with an arm around the neck of Larry, Uncle Stephen's huge dog, was turning to urge on Mr. Chope, standing, hesitant, in the next room.

"Come on in, Mr. Chope," he said coaxingly. Then, having succeeded in getting the old man a little nearer, he continued, "I thought as long as you were giving out offices to the Stuart family I'd bring in the janitor," he indicated Mr. Chope with a nod, "and the watchman. Come, Larry, shake hands with the ladies, and say you'll take good care of them."

Larry, who was on exceedingly good terms with almost all these young people, made his friendly way around the room, lifting his great head for the caresses showered upon him, and occasionally giving a deep "woof," or a soft paw when sufficiently urged.

Mr. Chope, stepping just inside the doorway, stood with his hat in his hand, beaming upon the assembled company while the boys shouted "Speech! speech!" and every one looked at him expectantly.

"I ain't much on speechifying," he began at last with that bashful good-fellowship which had made

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the Stuart children like him from the first moment, "but I'm a dabster"—he hesitated for an instant and his face wrinkled into one of its transfiguring smiles—"I'm a dabster at makin' fires, and that's more'n some janitors can say. Any time you want one jest say the word, and A. J. Chope, Janitor, 'll be on hand."

He backed out of the room so consciously pleased with himself that his audience gave him a round of applause. Larry bounded after him, and they could all hear Mr. Chope say as he held the outside door open, "Steady there, watchman. Don't you go knockin' down the janitor," and then his mirthful chuckle was cut short by the closing of the door.

"A. J. Chope," murmured Jane. "I suppose I thought he must have a first name, but I never heard even his initials before. Did you notice how nice he looked? I'm afraid he's getting to be a dandy."

"He got that purple necktie down at the store the other day," Kenneth remarked confidentially. "He said it was his favorite color, and he thought men and boys ought to look as well as they could on account of the ladies."

"Good for Mr. Chope," began Jane, and then stopped and stared out of the window near her into the gathering darkness. Mr. Chope's necktie

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had made her remember the purple satin gown, and from that her mind had jumped swiftly to the sad, unfriendly face of the girl in the bayberry-candle house. She had been too busy lately to think of her, but now the girl pushed her way insistently into Jane's memory as though demanding her share of fun and comradeship.

"I don't see how I can do anything about it," Jane told herself uncomfortably. "She won't even let me be pleasant to her." Suddenly her gaze focused itself on the window, and she was immediately conscious that the face she had been seeing in her mind was there in reality, close to the glass, and hungrily observant of the good cheer within the room.

With what she considered great presence of mind Jane repressed a little shriek, and promptly started across the room to where her mother was sitting, but one glance over her shoulder showed her that when she moved the face disappeared. "No use to say anything about it," she decided with unusual wisdom. "Some one might run out after the poor thing. I wish I could forget about her."

Serena was just starting a gay tune on her zither, and the songs that followed helped to quiet Jane's perturbed spirit. To the joy of all of them, Mr. Prescott knew many of their songs, and added a

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deep, sweet bass which made a fine foundation for the more youthful voices. He no longer seemed like a stranger to any of them, for he had chatted and laughed and entered into their fun so completely that he seemed like one of themselves. He was seated near Mrs. Stuart now and Jane could tell at a glance that mother liked him. "I must find out from Rob whether he really is an artist," she thought with some eagerness. "Probably that was only part of the joke."

"It's all dark and moonlighty outside," announced Kenneth, coming back to the inner circle after a prolonged survey of the night. "I should think 'twas 'bout time ——"

"So should I," agreed Rob, jumping up from the floor, and starting for the next room. "Come on, boys. Get your rubbers and your other duds, girls. We're going for a stroll."

Five minutes later the boys came back each with a small, brightly polished lantern. "Dr. Reed's auto is over on the road by the Trent house," Rob announced, "and he says he'll walk with us, and the chauffeur can take Mrs. Stuart and Judy and any of the others."

Carol, whose weak ankle frequently bothered her, and Peggy, who could always be persuaded to ride whenever there was a chance, decided to go in the machine with Mrs. Stuart. The others took

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their way beachward, with the bobbing lanterns faintly illumining a path which was always being lost and found again.

The lanterns, which to Jane's fancy seemed like fireflies, threw queer shadows about them, and there were strange crackling noises, and the steady swish-swish through the fallen leaves. Suddenly she thought again of the face she had seen through the window, and she edged a little nearer Dr. Reed, who happened at the moment to be walking beside her.

"I don't like queer, uncanny people, do you?" she asked, looking up at him with an unconscious appeal in her eyes.

"Not often; but who is queer and uncanny?" he questioned in a low voice.

Under cover of the gay chatter going on about her, Jane told Polly's father about her first meeting with the bayberry-candle girl, and about this most recent glimpse of her. "I more than half believe she's right around here somewhere, and it makes me feel spooky," she ended, glancing over her shoulder apprehensively.

To her surprise the light from the doctor's lantern revealed a very sober face looking down at her.

"Jane, I'm sorry for Mary Brown," Dr. Reed said softly. "She's a poor, unhappy girl, and she

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needs friends more than any one I know. Some time perhaps I shall ask you to help me out a little."

"Me!" exclaimed Jane. "She can't endure me," but before she could say anything more the doctor was off by himself, turning his lantern with apparent carelessness from side to side, and whistling softly as he walked.

By the time they reached the beach the sky was sown with stars, and in their midst a silver moon sailed serenely. The tide was out, leaving a smooth expanse of sand, and here the boys drove pointed stakes which appeared mysteriously from behind Mr. Chope's little shelter house on the ridge. On these they hung their twinkling lanterns, which from a little distance looked like jeweled pendants suspended mysteriously in air. Out of reach of the water, on the dry sand, rose a great dark heap of brushwood.

"Oh, a bonfire!" shrieked Polly. "Boys, have you brought plenty of potatoes?"

"Isn't that just what you'd expect Polly to say?" Rita observed maliciously. "Such fattening things, too."

Polly walked away with a shrug. She knew it was absurd to take Rita's remarks to heart, but she couldn't always help it.

"It's a shame it's too late for corn," remarked

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Ned. "We got so interested in the club-house this year that we forgot our usual bonfire."

"Potatoes and salt and crackers are good enough for any one," Rob said decidedly. He and David, and Mr. Chope, who had met them at the beach, were busy stowing away potatoes in the heap of brush which Kenneth and Mr. Chope had collected and piled with a view to speedy consumption.

Mrs. Stuart and the girls stood around waiting with eager anxiety for the torch to be applied. Jane, with Donald, had walked a little way back from the others toward Mr. Chope's shelter, and Jane was telling her cousin about the first clam-bake the Stuart family had in Belhaven, and how she had almost missed the time of her life by refusing to eat a clam. Near by Dr. Reed and Mr. Prescott were getting acquainted with each other.

Suddenly Jane stopped speaking and clutched Donald's arm.

"Did you see that?" she half whispered. "Some one is watching us from behind Mr. Chope's little house."

"It's just two girls," Donald said calmly. "I saw them come up there a minute ago. They probably want to see the fun."

"Then I know who it is. It's the girl I told you about the other afternoon. Don't you remem-

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ber—the one who thought I was going to carry off her dog?” Jane spoke in a soft undertone, and made a hesitating movement in the direction of Dr. Reed, who was a short distance away from them with his back toward the shelter. “Do you think I ought to tell him?” she asked doubtfully. “He’s her doctor, you see, and we were speaking about her on the way over.”

“Why don’t you let her look on without being noticed if she wants to?” Donald’s question was so matter of fact and sensible that Jane felt a little ashamed of herself for making so much out of the occurrence. Of course, why shouldn’t the girl look on if she wished? The beach was free to every one.

“Let’s go back with the others,” she proposed abruptly, turning her back to the little house on the crest of the beach, and facing the ocean and the bonfire. “Oh, look, they’ve lighted it already! See the fire creeping up through the branches.”

The wood was so dry and had been heaped so scientifically that almost before she finished speaking, a volume of flame burst forth and leaped into the air. There was a shout of delight from the young people on the beach, and on the end of it, so close that it seemed like an echo, came a half-stifled shriek of intense terror, which was heard

Jane Stuart's Chum

only by the four persons standing near Mr. Chope's little house.

Dr. Reed and Jane, wheeling at the same moment, were instantly sure that the girl, standing as if petrified, and with not the slightest attempt at concealment, was the Mary Brown of whom they had been speaking. She was apparently unaware of anything except the mounting flames, but before Dr. Reed had taken two steps toward her, she had turned, and was running as though her life depended upon it. Another person, apparently an older, larger girl, followed, getting over the ground with ineffectual clumsiness, and calling under her breath to the flying figure before her.

"Better not say anything about this to the others," Dr. Reed cautioned, as he and Mr. Prescott reached Jane and Donald. "It's more explainable than it seems, though I can't tell you about it now. I believe I'll follow them. Jane, please tell your mother that I don't want my youngster to stay too late." And then he, also, took the road in pursuit, and a moment later was lost to sight in the darkness.

"Is—is any one else going to fly off like that?" quavered Jane, shaking a little in spite of herself. "I believe I want to go back where folks are."

The tall young man beside her was instantly

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sympathetic. "You've had too many surprises, Miss Jane," he said, bending his head to look at her. "First, my foolishness, and now—this."

"Oh, I didn't mind you at all," Jane hastened to say. "But that scream." The little shuddering sigh with which she ended was so unmistakable that Donald tucked her hand under his arm protectingly. "Come on, Mrs. Janes," he said, turning her toward the cheerful fire and the gay group on the beach. "Come on and get warm."

"See! What a picture!" Mr. Prescott paused when they had covered half the distance. "How the firelight brings out the faces, and throws wonderful shadows. Ach, what would I gif to paint him."

Jane faced him excitedly. "Then you are really an artist," she said breathlessly. "Oh, I have so wanted to know one, and that is just the way I feel when I see anything beautiful. I wish—I wish ——"

"Yes, you wish ——?"

There was something so encouraging, so friendly in the voice and manner of this new acquaintance that Jane found it almost easy to go on.

"I wish I could some time talk to you about it," she ventured. "A real artist would know whether it is worth while for me to try to learn to draw and paint."

Jane Stuart's Chum

They had come almost to the others now, but there was still time for the young man's answer.

"I'm not yet a real artist, Miss Jane," he said in all humility. "It takes a lifetime—but I'm working always and—and loving it. If you haf the strong desire—and are willing to work, that is at least one reason why I should think it worth while for you to try. Some time—before long, perhaps, I shall see you again, and you will show me your sketches, nicht wahr? We will then talk about it all." He finished hurriedly, for light and warmth and questioning people were all about them.

"I am only too sorry to say good-bye," he went on in response to a question from Mrs. Stuart. "But trains will not wait, and I have promised my grandfather that I shall return to-night. Dr. Reed offers to send me to the station in his automobile, and I must make my farewells quickly."

Rob, coming back to the beach after taking Mr. Prescott to the doctor's car, found Jane strangely silent, clinging to her mother's arm.

"What's the matter, Lady Jane?" he demanded. "Why aren't you dancing around, and making fun for the rest of us the way you usually do? Hold on, I have a beautiful gift for you." He left her, and Jane could see him making apparently futile dabs at the fire with a long iron rod. At last he

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gave a cry of triumph, rushed at a boy standing near and took a salt-shaker from him ; on the way back to Jane captured a package of crackers, and finally presented his silent friend with a potato so hot that she had to roll it from hand to hand.

“ Hold it. It’s good for you,” he insisted inexorably when she threatened to drop it. “ Now always remember what my first present to you was. I picked that one out for you because it was the biggest and cleanest one I saw, and I tucked it away where I could find it. Now, isn’t that touching? ”

“ Terribly so,” said Jane, making up a little face. “ ’Specially touching when you keep it too long in one hand. Rob, you’re a ridiculous lad, but you make me feel quite cheerful again. Please give me the salt and two whole crackers.”

With the eating of the delicious potato Jane’s good spirits returned. One couldn’t be sober long in the midst of so much gayety. The boys threw wood on the fire until the flames illumined the smooth, hard beach nearer the water. There they played tag and ran races, and set up stakes for corners in a Puss-in-the-corner game. As the fire died down they took hands and danced around the blaze, and the Perpetual Chaperone was just like a girl, and Kenneth felt that he was as old as any of them, and Mr. Choze was either laughing

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or singing snatches of the sea-songs in which he delighted.

On the way home, Rob's father, meeting the jolly company at the corner where they were to separate, stopped to speak to all, and claim his boy.

"How did you like the new young man, Mrs. Stuart?" he questioned with some eagerness. "He's the son of an old friend of mine, and a fine fellow, I think."

"I like him very much, Mr. Randall," Mrs. Stuart said cordially. "He fitted in so well that he didn't seem like a 'new young man' at all. I'm sure I can speak for the others, too."

There was an enthusiastic chorus of agreement from almost all the listening group, and Mr. Randall's face, lighted by the lamp on the corner, beamed with pleasure.

"Glad of it," he said. "My friend, Fred Prescott, married a German girl, and this boy was born and educated over there, so it will be just like having a native teacher ——" He stopped abruptly and looked half apologetically at his son. "Well, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you, after all. Mr. Wells insists upon resigning, and we've voted this evening to try Frederick Prescott in his place."

There was a groan from Rob as his father finished. "Oh, Dad, you wouldn't even let me whisper it, and I was aching to tell," he said with such deep

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disgust that his chums roared with laughter, and expressed their delight over his discomfiture in various characteristic ways.

"I call it mighty sneaky to get acquainted with us all under false pretenses," Stanley muttered under cover of the laughter. He had suddenly realized that he had put himself wrong with the new teacher from the start.

Jane, happening to hear the remark, turned on him sharply. "I don't see why you're so grouchy about it. He wasn't pretending to be anything so far as I can see. And besides, he didn't actually know that he could have the position."

"Children, children, don't end a jolly evening by quarreling," said Mrs. Stuart with a laugh. "Stanley, I want to ask a favor of you." She had pulled him toward her as she spoke, and was looking straight into his eyes with her charming smile. "Will you please come in some day and look at my sewing-machine again? Davy doesn't compare with you as a machinist."

Stanley's irritation vanished. For the moment he was as clear-eyed and responsive as her own two boys. "Sure, I will. When do you want me?" he asked eagerly.

"The very first time you have a chance. And now scatter, children, or your mothers won't want me for a perpetual chaperone."

Jane Stuart's Chum

There was a chorus of farewells and parting jests as the young people separated. Molly Oliver, watching her chance, put her arms around Mrs. Stuart and laid a soft cheek on hers. "I do get so worried about Stan. I wish I knew how to manage boys the way you do," she murmured wistfully. "I believe—I believe you're the mother of all the world."

CHAPTER X

CAROL AND THE SHEETED SEVEN

For the next three weeks the weather played all sorts of tricks, and set people to wondering what season it really was. It began directly after the Snowshoe Club house-warming by turning almost as cold as winter, raining itself into hail, and tempestuously whipping the ocean until the waves became a sight worth going far to see. Then, about the middle of November, came several days when warm clothing seemed a burden, and one was again tempted by tennis and out-of-doors.

Jane, going home from school on one of the mildest of these afternoons, saw Dr. Reed stopping his automobile just ahead of her, and realized that he was waiting to speak to her. As she approached she recognized a gleam of triumph in his glance, so funnily like Polly when she had got her own way about something, that Jane laughed in spite of herself, and wondered what the doctor had been up to now.

"You thought I couldn't get her to, and I have," was his somewhat puzzling greeting.

"Who's her, and what have you made her do now?"

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Ungrammatical child! Don't let Miss Ball catch you saying 'who's her.' I'm talking about Mary Brown, of course."

"O-oh. How is she?" Jane knew that the girl in the bayberry-candle house had been ill since the night of the bonfire, and she tried to seem as interested and solicitous as she was sure Dr. Reed expected her to be. For some reason, perhaps because she had been so startled that night, her curiosity about Mary Brown was obscured by the feeling of dislike, almost of repulsion, that the girl's peculiarities had created. At this moment she wished with all her heart that she need not hear anything more about her.

"She's beginning to feel pretty well again now," announced the doctor triumphantly. "And she has promised me that she will let you come to see her next Friday afternoon. I steered her into saying that day because I know you girls always plan all the out-of-school things for Friday and Saturday."

Dr. Reed's enjoyment of his masterly management was so evident that Jane struggled to conquer her dismay. "But, Dr. Reed," she faltered at last, "it's—it's so pleasant out-of-doors this week, and Friday afternoon we're going for a walk and end up at the little house."

"Whe-ew," whistled the doctor contritely, con-

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scious all at once that his plan wasn't meeting with the favor he had expected. "I ought to have remembered to ask Polly before I set a day. She keeps me straight."

"But there are lots of nice girls who don't belong to our crowd," Jane suggested hopefully.

"She refuses to have any one but you."

"How queer, when I know she hasn't any use for me. Why couldn't I go some other afternoon, then?" In her secret heart Jane was wishing she need not be obliged to go at all. She never knew just how to act with people who were ill, or in any way strange.

"It seems absurd," began Dr. Reed after a thoughtful pause, "but do you know, I'm almost sure that if I try to change the day I shan't be able to get her to promise again. And I'm counting a great deal on having the right sort of a girl to help poor Mary and ——"

"Is she poor?" Jane asked suddenly, quite unconscious that she was interrupting.

"I consider her the poorest girl I know," answered the doctor slowly, frowning a little as he spoke. "Let's see, Jane. This is Tuesday, isn't it? Why not think it over for a day or two? In the meantime perhaps I can make a different arrangement. At any rate you needn't plan to spend the whole afternoon with her. Perhaps a

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half hour, or an hour—just to help me out of my experiment. I've got to make that poor girl well in some way, Miss Jane Stuart, and I need you for an assistant."

Dr. Reed's manner was so pleading, so confidential, so funnily insistent, that Jane had to smile back at him, though inwardly she still felt rebellious.

"Well, I suppose I can go," she said, and was a little ashamed to have it sound so half-hearted. "You'll have to tell me how to behave," she went on. "I shall be sure to say or do something to make her go off like a firecracker."

"Just be yourself. But I'll see you again, and find out if you really will be my assistant. I don't want to force you into anything, you know."

Jane fancied the doctor wasn't quite so pleased with her as usual, and as the machine glided away she still stood there with her eyes fixed on the ground and the toe of her shoe mechanically rolling over and over a small sharp pebble. She couldn't understand why Mary Brown should want her, nor why she, herself, was finding it so difficult to slide out of doing a disagreeable thing. "If she wasn't so—so uncanny, I suppose I should be crazy to know who she is and all about her," she said to herself gloomily, "but as it is—— Ouch! that stone is as sharp as a needle. I shall have a

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hole in my shoe if I keep on, and then mother will be sad." She started once more toward home, her mind busy in trying to find a way out of this unpleasant situation, but a moment later a sharply prolonged, "Ja-ane," made her stop and turn around.

"You're rushing as if wild animals were after you," said Carol, coming up quite breathless and rather aggrieved. "I called you three times before you paid any attention."

"I didn't hear a sound. I waited for you after school, but some one said you'd gone."

"No, I was trying to explain to Miss Coles why I positively can't get to school on time in the morning, but somehow she didn't seem to understand my point of view. I don't get on a bit well with people who don't see things the way I do."

Jane could not help laughing at her friend's plaintive manner, and, for the moment, forgot her own perplexities. "Poor little Carol! It's a shame she's so abused."

"Oh, I am, I am. I'm as blue as indigo to-day, and so cross I can't see straight. Rita Hastings and those girls she goes with get on my nerves so that I just can't stand them. You've either got to be terribly chummy with them, or let them alone and have them hate you. They're perfectly horrid to me."

Jane Stuart's Chum

"What do they do?" asked Jane curiously.

"Oh, I don't know," Carol responded vaguely. "It's more the atmosphere, you know—and little remarks. Can't you always feel it when people don't like you, and—and have it in for you? I suppose I have said things ——" she stopped, and looked at Jane with a mischievous appeal in her eyes.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you have," Jane responded unfeelingly. "I've seen Rita just boiling mad over some of the things you said to her when she was trying to be chummy with you. But don't you worry. They'll get tired of it."

"I hope so. I'd give anything if something really nice would happen to me. When do you suppose the Junior Ninepins are going to initiate us, Lady Jane?"

"Why, I don't know," began Jane slowly, but Carol went on without waiting for a more definite answer.

"Do you suppose it hurts?" she said with a nervous laugh. "I'm all in a twitter when I think of it."

"Of course not. They only make you do something queer or funny; something you would never expect to do. At least that's my idea of it, and I feel it in my bones that it's going to happen soon."

Carol and the Sheeted Seven

"So do I," murmured Carol, getting a fresh hold on her books, and preparing to start along. "Can't you come over this afternoon, Jane?"

"Afraid I can't. Mother called after me when I went to school to tell me not to promise to do anything because she wanted me," Jane explained.

"I'm sorry. I thought you might cheer me up."

"I've got troubles of my own," Jane called from the piazza, and Carol in her sympathetic interest almost turned back to ask what they were, but decided to go home instead.

At the front door the maid greeted her with the news that her mother had unexpectedly gone to the city, and she immediately felt aggrieved because she had not gone also. Then, her eye falling on a queer-looking missive lying on the hall-table, she pounced upon it and found it was addressed to her.

"A small boy left it, Miss Carol," volunteered the maid as she disappeared from view.

The paper, which was without an envelope, was folded in a shape which, to any one with an active imagination, might have suggested some kind of a queer bird, and Carol, already feeling more cheerful, spurred her fancy to meet the situation.

"It's the 'Ninepins,' of course. It's meant for an owl, I'm sure, and that's their mascot," she meditated, staring hard at the folded paper. Then,

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as she opened it, "Probably Peggy's little brother left it."

Only a few lines in a queer, angular handwriting met her eye: "Go to the 'Nutshell' and ask for a note addressed to you. Speak to no one about what you are told to do this afternoon."

The "Nutshell" was a gift-shop on the way to the station, and Carol began to put the hatpins back into her hat at once.

"Never mind getting anything for me, Cora," she said, poking her head into the dining-room, where the preparations already made for her lunch almost shook her resolution. "I'm not very hungry, and I'm in a hurry to go out again."

As she left the house it occurred to her that probably Jane had received a similar communication, and she wondered if they should meet in the course of their wanderings. To be sure Jane had said her mother needed her this afternoon, but, of course, no self-respecting mother would keep her daughter away from an initiation. "There's no knowing what those girls will make me do," she said to herself faint-heartedly. "They're always poking fun at me because I hate to walk. Why, oh why, did they hit on a day when the automobile is being repaired?"

The proprietress of the "Nutshell," who was a

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great favorite with all the girls, waved an envelope at her as she entered the shop. "Left for you by a small boy whom I don't know," was the friendly greeting, and Carol took the missive to find in staring letters on the outside, "Open before leaving the 'Nutshell.'" Inside came first the peremptory command, "Buy two pounds of the home-made candy, and bring it with you!"

"Well, I like that!" began Carol, and then remembered that she had been cautioned not to tell what she was required to do. "I'll take two pounds of the home-made," she said rather sulkily, recalling, to her discomfort, that her allowance was at a low ebb. She turned back to the note while she waited, and read, "Go to post-office and ask for letter in your box."

"Horrors! Another long walk, and the box of candy to carry!" Carol's face grew very sober. The fun of being initiated wasn't all she had supposed it to be, she decided.

The decree of the post-office note seemed even more exhausting than the others. "Go"—Carol groaned softly over the first word—"go to the Murray elm, stay underneath it, blindfold yourself and wait for what will happen. If you peek it will be known, and all you have done this afternoon will be wasted."

Every one in Belhaven knew the old elm,

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famous for its beauty, which stood in a vacant lot owned by the Murray family.

"It's a good half mile from here. I simply will not go," decided Carol stubbornly. Then the memory of some of the Ninepin good times she had heard about made her change her mind, and she started out, hoping with all her heart that this would be the end of her pilgrimage. "Anyway, probably there won't be any more foolish letters, and that will be a relief."

Arrived at last under the big elm, she sat down forlornly with her back against it, and the candy-box lying in her lap. "I wish I had something thicker than this ridiculous little handkerchief for a bandage," she murmured, trying to adjust it so that it wouldn't come off. When that was accomplished she closed her eyes and rested her head against the tree. They needn't be worried for fear she would peek, she told herself wearily. She was glad to shut her eyes, and she didn't care anything about their old club.

She began to take a little more interest in life and initiations, when, at the end of what seemed to her an interminable silence, she was aware of a soft tread close at hand, and the gentle removal of the box of candy from her lap.

"Get up," a perfectly unrecognizable voice said in her ear. "Come with me."

Carol and the Sheeted Seven

"I'm shutting my eyes so tight that it hurts," Carol hastened to remark as she scrambled to her feet, but this elicited no encouraging comment from the girl who had her in charge, and who was already starting off with her arm firmly in that of her captive.

Judging from her height Carol felt sure that her guide was either Serena or Molly, but her artful attempts to find out met with no response, and she relapsed into silence. With her eyes shut and bandaged, the way seemed tiresomely long, and she breathed a sigh of relief when the mounting of steps proclaimed that they had arrived somewhere.

"Sit down. Wait until you're told before you open your eyes," said the muffled voice, and then Carol realized that she was being seated in a chair, that there was a sound of retreating footsteps, and that a door had closed with a soft click.

There was something so oppressive about being left alone in a place she didn't know, that Carol's first impulse was to tear off the handkerchief and look about her. Then, deciding that it would be too bad to give up after what she had already been through, she resigned herself to the situation, and shut her eyes tighter than ever.

Fortunately this time the suspense was soon over, for the door opened and she could hear

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stealthy footsteps and the soft rustle of garments. Then the handkerchief was taken from her eyes, and for the first moment she could see nothing.

Gradually her eyes accustomed themselves to freedom and the gloominess of the room in which she found herself. In one glance she discovered that heavy draperies veiled the windows, and that the two widely separated candles gave so little light that she could not recognize the room, nor identify the sheeted figures which sat in a row a little distance from her.

For an instant nothing broke the tense silence. Then, "You are brought here to be tried by this honorable court," said a voice so effectually disguised that it gave the victim not the least clue. "Are you ever able to tell the truth?"

"Oh, yes, once in a while," Carol answered, determined to carry off her part of it lightly. In her secret heart she was already resenting this first question.

"She tells the truth once in a while," came in solemn muffled chorus from the sheeted figures, and Carol jumped nervously. All at once the whole thing seemed to her very stupid and silly, and she wished herself out of it. Then, as before, she resolved to make the best of it.

"How many times a week do you think you

Carol and the Sheeted Seven

tell the truth?" demanded the single voice peremptorily.

"Oh, perhaps seven," was the airy response; "possibly once a day."

There was a rustle of garments as the swaying figures took up the refrain. "She—speaks—the—truth—possibly—once—a—day," they chanted in an explosive whisper.

Carol shivered a little. The gloom, the lack of air, the solemn chorus, were getting on her nerves. She had thought the Ninepin girls were such good friends, and now they were being altogether horrid to her. She counted them over. There were seven, and her mind leaped at once to the conclusion that Jane had been initiated earlier in the afternoon, and was now permitted to join in this ceremony.

"Were you telling the truth when you said your mother knows the author of—of—oh, of that book every one is talking about just now? You remember the one I mean. And are you truly going to entertain the author?"

Carol did remember, and she felt as though a small-sized bomb had exploded under her feet. "I—why—I"—she stammered hastily, not stopping to realize that no one could make her answer if she should refuse—"my mother did meet a lady—who knows a lady—who knew the author

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when he was a little boy. And if he ever did come to Boston, perhaps ——” her voice died away into silence.

“Perhaps—if he ever did come to Boston,” groaned the chorus sadly. “Her mother knows a lady who knew a lady.”

“Oh, I think you’re perfectly maddening,” said Carol, trying to take it all like a good sport, and somehow managing a laugh that sounded perilously near to tears. “You know I don’t expect you to believe those things when I say them.

“You’d much better take out those buttons or marbles or whatever you have in your mouths, and put in some of my delicious home-made instead,” she went on audaciously, when a moment’s pause in the proceedings had given her a slight renewal of courage.

The figure in the middle of the row waggled its head ominously, and the others followed suit.

“We are not to be bribed, but we accept your offer of the candy,” announced the muffled voice of the chief inquisitor. Then there was another oppressive pause which got on Carol’s nerves even more than the questions. She felt that she disliked all the girls violently. In the half light she had already decided that Molly was the tall figure in the middle, and that Serena was at one end and Jane—it hurt more than anything else to

Carol and the Sheeted Seven

think it was Jane—was at the other. The remaining figures were all about of a height, and, except that one of them looked stouter than the rest and might be Polly, she could not distinguish them.

“Were you telling the truth,” the figure in the center of the row monotonously began again, “when you asked a girl to meet you, didn’t keep your appointment, and said your mother wouldn’t let you go?”

Carol searched her memory wildly for a moment to place this particular instance. It might have answered for several occasions, she confessed to herself with some shame. Probably Rita Hastings was the girl they meant, for Rita had found out that Mrs. Heath wasn’t at home that afternoon, and hadn’t hesitated to make public that fact, and her own tedious waiting.

“Oh, well, it made it easier for the girl to think that,” Carol muttered sulkily, beginning to wonder why she was answering these questions and why she didn’t just get up and walk out. “And, anyway, if mother had been at home she probably wouldn’t have let me go.”

There was a suppressed giggle, and one of the shorter figures shook silently. Carol felt sure that it was Marian Chester. She glanced furtively toward the door, and tried to get up courage to put

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an end to all this. Suddenly Jane's description of an initiation flashed through her mind: "They only make you do something queer or funny; something you would never expect to do." Jane had certainly hit it right, she thought forlornly, but she herself had never dreamed that anything could make her feel so friendless, so forsaken as she did at this moment.

"Do you realize," the hateful voice had begun again, "that no one who really knows you believes the stories you tell? That if you say a thing is so, they feel sure that it isn't. Were you telling the truth"—Carol put both hands over her ears and then limply let them fall again. She knew she should shriek if she should have to hear those words again—"when you said that you tried to lead a blind man across a street in the city, and the man struggled, and a policeman threatened to arrest you for kidnapping?"

"Oh—oh, no one but Jane could tell that wasn't true!" Carol burst into a storm of tears and jumped from her chair. "I—I'm going home," she sobbed, feeling her way blindly to the door. There was a murmur of protest, a movement of the sheeted figures toward her.

"Don't you dare stop me," she cried in a shrill, hysterical voice. "You're mean, cruel girls, and—and most of all I hate you, Jane Stuart."

CHAPTER XI

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

ONCE outside in the clear sunshine, Carol did not stop to find out where she was, nor from what house she had come, but ran without seeing, shaken by choking sobs, and searching wildly for an undiscoverable handkerchief. Suddenly she turned her ankle and almost went down; then limped along despairingly in spite of the hurt of it until a boy, coming around a corner on a bicycle, recognized her and nearly fell off in his amazement.

"Here! Hold up! What is the matter, Carol?" he demanded so sympathetically that an unrestrained sob was her only response. In another second he was walking beside her with his wheel, and trying to see the face which she obstinately averted.

At the first sound of his voice she had started toward him in her relief. Then she remembered that this was Jane's brother, her twin, and that he felt just as Jane did about a great many things.

"I wish you'd go away," she whimpered, the effort to speak making the tears come blindingly again. "I—I don't want to see any one."

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"Well, perhaps you don't," responded David with the severity he sometimes felt obliged to use with Jane, "but if you think I'm going to leave you a mile away from home, limping like a good one in the wrong direction, and—and not looking—exactly—happy, you're mistaken. Here, take this," he ended peremptorily. "It's clean. Mother tucked it into my pocket just before I left home."

Carol took the handkerchief thankfully, though she still refused to look at him.

"Now let's go the other way, and you tell me what the matter is," he coaxed a moment later.

"No, no; not that way!" Carol was all tears and excitement again. "I—I couldn't go by that house," she said with a shudder.

"What house? We can turn down this street we've just passed, and then we shan't go by it. Here, sit on my bike and I'll wheel you. That ankle isn't fit to be stepped on."

Carol obeyed without a word. It was so good to have some one kind to her instead of horrid, she thought with a sigh of pity for herself.

"Are you—were you going home?" she asked a few moments later, having regained a fair degree of calmness.

"I am and I was." David realized that his answer sounded curt, but long experience had

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taught him that when his twin was trying to keep back the tears it was wiser for him to seem unsympathetic, and he supposed all girls were built that way.

Carol was silent for some time after that except for an occasional shuddering sigh which she tried hard to smother. Probably David and the other boys knew something about this trick the girls had played on her. Very likely they all thought it would be good for her to have her faults shown up in this way. No doubt they expected her to reform, and never tell the funny, interesting things that made people stare, and wonder, and then laugh. She made up her mind to ask her mother and father to go away from Belhaven. She never wanted to see those girls again, not even Jane. And then at the thought of Jane, her lip quivered, and a large tear slid down her nose without interruption.

They were getting near the center of the town now and David glanced furtively at his charge. To his dismay she was showing all the symptoms of bursting into tears again.

"Say, Carol, brace up," he entreated, and then, hoping to make her laugh, "if you go by the post-office looking that way they'll think I've kidnapped you, and the town policeman will arrest me."

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"Don't you say 'kidnapped' and 'policeman' to me, David Stuart. That's what those girls said I said, and—and perhaps I did, but I won't have you twitting me about it. Stop this wheel. I'm going to get off and walk by myself."

In his astonishment David did as requested, and Carol started off, limping a little still, but not so painfully as before.

"See here, I'm going to walk with you, and you may as well make up your mind to it," David said firmly, dancing around a bit in the effort to make his stride fit her short steps, and at last giving up the undertaking as hopeless. "You'd better come right in with me and see mother and Jane. Oh, I forgot, mother is busy just now."

"And Jane isn't at home," Carol amended with such bitterness of tone that David stared at her blankly.

"I bet she is," he ventured a moment later. "She was when I left."

"Well, you'll find she isn't now. Anyway, I don't want to see her," and Carol, taking a hasty step as if anxious to escape the possibility of a meeting with Jane, turned her ankle again, and this time sat flatly on the sidewalk. The sharp pain forced her to clasp her knees tightly and drop her head on them for an instant. Then she held up a very white face, and with a courage which

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made David want to take off his hat to her, tried to smile.

“Oh, dear, that will mean a day or two with my foot up,” she said resignedly. “Don’t look so scared, David. I’ve done it before. I wish mother was at home, though.”

“Don’t you try to bear your weight on that again,” ordered David, picking her up before she could protest. “Hold on to the fence and stand on the other foot till I get the wheel ready. Now, on you go and don’t you dare get off until I say so.”

To be ordered about and taken care of made the hurt of both mind and ankle easier to bear, and without further protest she sat meekly on the wheel while David rolled it to the end of the street and around the corner, and along that street until they came to the driveway of his own house.

“Now, listen,” he said compellingly, “mother is having some ladies in to sew for the church, and I know you won’t want to go into the house. But your mother isn’t at home, and that ankle needs attention. I’m going to wheel you right into the barn, and have Susan Trot out here to look at it. She’s a cracker-jack about those things, and she’ll have the time of her life.” David paused and looked at his afflicted friend sternly. “Now don’t try any funny business, and slide off and hurt

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your ankle ten times worse, because I'm going to have my own way," he ended, and started again toward the barn, the door of which stood hospitably open.

Except for Sally, meditating in her stall, no one was in sight, and Carol sighed thankfully as she slipped off the wheel into a chair and put her foot on the box which David brought to her.

"Please don't tell any one but Susan," she said plaintively as he started toward the door. "And, David, just ask her if I may have a cooky—or something; I haven't had a mite of lunch."

"Thunderation!" exploded David. "Don't you move. We'll be out in a jiffy."

For a few moments Carol sat very still, looking out through the doorway with eyes that scarcely saw what they rested upon. She was living over in her mind the whole wretched afternoon, and she pitied herself heartily. As she thought about it there came again the hot pressure of tears, and choking sobs, which for the moment kept her from hearing that some one was moving around in the harness room, and coughing a discreet warning of his presence.

At last a cough, so forced that it sounded like anything but that for which it was intended, startled her into silence, and she demanded quaveringly, "Who—who's there?"

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"It's only me," answered Mr. Chope in mild apology, poking his head out from the other room, and fixing his eyes on Sally as though she were the one he was addressing. "It's kinder lonesome in this old barn, and I thought some of you might feel better if you knew I was here."

"I'm not lonesome." Carol wept again because of the very kindliness of his tone. "It's—it's—only—that I—can't—stop crying."

"Sho! Got started, did you, and can't turn it off? Well, now, you don't want to tire out that tear machinery of yours, becuz you may want to use it agin some day." He was busying himself about Sally's stall as he spoke, and had not once looked at his guest, who was mopping her eyes with David's handkerchief, and trying hard to regain her self-control.

Suddenly he came toward her. "Here, let me take the hankerchief," he said gently, and to Carol's surprise his glance fell at once on her own small handkerchief, for which she had vainly searched, and which was now sticking out from her sleeve.

"This one'll do fust-rate," he continued, marching off with it and returning in an instant to lay it cold and wet in her hand. "There, that'll help those tears to stay whar they belong."

He went to the door of the barn and looked out while Carol gratefully pressed the comforting

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handkerchief to her hot forehead and eyes. "It takes Davy some time to git a holt of Miss Trot," he remarked casually. "Mis' Stuart, she's been havin' ladies there sewin' this afternoon, and Lady Jane and Miss Trot was juggling teacups, and gittin' things to eat for them when I was last in the kitchen."

"Not Jane!" Carol stopped wiping her eyes and spoke quite naturally. "You must be mistaken about Jane. I—I left her miles away just a little while ago."

"Did you reely?" Mr. Chope turned to her with an expression which began with surprise, and ended in one of his wonderful smiles. "You're tryin' to fool me," he said genially, "and jest for a minit' I was like all the rest of 'em—didn't know whether to believe you or not."

"Oh," groaned Carol in such a heartfelt way that the old man looked at her solicitously. "Does—does every one think of me like that?"

"That's jest somethin' I've happened to hear 'em say. It's likely they don't mean a thing by it." The tear-wet eyes looking at him so reproachfully, the pitiful, quivering chin, stirred the old man's feelings to the utmost. He had never cared particularly for this girl before, but now he wanted nothing so much as to see her look happy again.

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"Mr. Chope," began Carol in a small, pathetic voice, "did you ever tell anything, and try to—to make it entertaining, and get so interested in it yourself that you almost forgot that it didn't—that it didn't happen just that way?"

Mr. Chope's face assumed an expression of startled perplexity, which the girl absorbed in her own troubles failed to notice. It seemed as though a new problem, unpleasant, and hard to wrestle with, had suddenly filled his thoughts.

"You see," Carol went on more easily, and as if it were the most tremendous relief to tell some one about it, "the Ninepin girls have been initiating me this afternoon, and—and they made me feel as if I'd never told the truth in my life." She shuddered a little at the recollection of the chanting chorus. She could hear it now. "One of the stories they—they accused me of—they must have known about from Jane," she hurried on, her tone growing more positive. "She was the only one who could know it wasn't true, and she was there. I saw her."

"What kind of a story was it?"

Mr. Chope's voice was so curiously insistent that Carol glanced at him in surprise. It seemed to her that he had lost some of his ruddy coloring and that his eyes looked troubled.

"It was something that partly happened to

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Jane," she began, wondering all of a sudden why she should be making a confidant of this old man. "I—I made it over a little. You see I'm always imagining adventures about myself, and sometimes—I actually get to believing they're true."

Mr. Chope twisted his face into a smile that looked as if it hurt. "And then when folks find out that you tell sich things, they jest don't believe much of anythin' you say? Is that it?" he questioned delicately, but with a certain air of apprehension.

"I suppose so." Carol hated to have the situation made so plain to her.

"An' jest now you don't care so much becuz you're pretty and delightful, and the girls and boys want to be friends with you." Mr. Chope had turned away and was gazing out through the barn-door with a little frown. "Lady Jane and David, they set great store by you, but they're so downright honest they won't always feel so if they don't ever know when you're tellin' the truth."

Carol shrank a little at that, then shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She was beginning to be tired of having this fault of hers taken so seriously, and she wished that David would come and take her home.

"Oh, well," she began with something of her old, imperious way, "I suppose ——" but Mr. Chope interrupted her.

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"You see it ain't never been so clear to me as it is jest now," he went on, with an eager appeal in his eyes and voice, "that ef you talk that way part of the time it kinder takes away the value of the rest of what you say. Folks ain't to blame ef they don't know when to believe you. And so I think it would be an awful good plan ef you would make up your mind right here—this very minit'," the persuasive, lingering way in which Mr. Chope made it seem the appointed place and time for any good resolve was not lost on his hearer, "ef you would make up your mind to stop tellin' things that ain't so."

The old man paused for breath and looked anxiously at the frowning, averted face of the girl in the chair.

"Of course you can't expect to stop all at once," he said with a wistful earnestness that dispelled Carol's irritation, and made her wonder why queer old Mr. Chope was taking her sins so much to heart. "Ef those stories do bust out sometimes why can't you jest explain that it's because your wonderful 'magination gits away from you once in a while?"

Carol looked up suddenly to meet the kind old eyes in which anxiety, sympathetic comprehension and a certain comradeship were mingled. All at once it occurred to her how she would feel if she

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had to explain her stories as he suggested to—to Rita Hastings, for instance, and, in spite of everything, her gay laugh rippled out.

"Mr. Chope, you actually make me want to do what you say—about stopping, I mean,—not explaining," she conceded unexpectedly. "Anyway, I feel that way right this minute, and I hope, I do hope it will—last." She was almost happy again, and her eyes were dancing. For the moment she had forgotten that she was an ill-treated young person with a distinct grievance against all her best friends.

"Shake hands on it, Mr. Chope," she went on, laying her own hand in the work-begrimed one stretched out to meet it. "That makes it more binding, you know."

"Looks like a lily against my dark old fist, don't it?" murmured Mr. Chope admiringly. "But I bet that's the hand of a little lady that's goin' to make every one believe what she says."

"I—I hope so," said Carol, turning suddenly serious again. "I'm honestly going to try."

A sudden confusion of voices in the direction of the house came so startlingly close upon the announcement of her resolve that Carol jumped and twitched the lame ankle, which had peacefully been trying to get better.

"That's a shame," said Mr. Chope feelingly.

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"I guess Davy's managed to get hold of them girls now, and you'll git somethin' done for that poor little foot."

Carol could hear Jane's voice raised in protest as they approached. "Spinksy Stuart, you never told me Carol was out there, and that she'd hurt her ankle, and was starving. At least you didn't make me understand."

There was an inarticulate murmur from David, and then the two came in sight, and into the barn, Jane, as usual, leading.

"Carol, you poor little thing." Jane was touched at once by her friend's white face and drooping attitude. "I'm awfully sorry we've been so long, and here's something to eat, and Susan is coming in a minute to fix up your ankle."

"I guess you'll think I'm a chump," said David. "When I got in there the girls were hustling between the kitchen and the dining-room and I couldn't make either one of them stop long enough to listen to me. And then, when I followed Mrs. Janes almost into the dining-room, she jammed a tray into my hands, and gave me a push that landed me right in where the ladies were. I had to pretend I went on purpose, and go around and collect cups. My, it was fierce!"

"And so were you," said Jane, laughing at the recollection of her twin's face. "I didn't know

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he was trying to tell me anything important, and I took a swift look at him first to see if he was respectable. Try some chocolate, Carol, and some of these sandwiches. They're awfully good, if I did make 'em."

Carol put out her hand, but drew it back again quickly. Then, as Mr. Chope and David left the two girls to themselves, she looked at her friend appealingly. "How—how long have you been at home, Jane?" she asked with an uncontrollable little shiver cutting into her words.

"All the afternoon. You remember I told you mother wanted me for something, and this was it. Why do you want to know?"

Jane's clear eyes met her own so frankly that doubt of her was impossible. Carol took a sandwich and ate it hungrily.

"Didn't you know—didn't you have any word about the initiation?" she began again after a moment.

"What initiation?" Jane's voice and face expressed a dismay that could not be mistaken. "Oh, Carol, you don't mean that the Ninepins have taken you in and left me out? But I don't see how! Why, it can't be, for Serena and Peggy and Polly all left school early because Mrs. Reed was going to take them to the city this afternoon."

Like a flash the remembrance came to Carol

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that she had known that, too, but for some reason it seemed like last week, or a month ago, that she had heard it.

"And Molly's aunt is here spending the day," pursued Jane, "and Marian Chester is at home with a sore throat. That leaves only Esther, and she wouldn't get up an initiation all by herself. My, but you scared me!"

Carol was staring at Jane in a queer, intent way which made the latter nervous. Then, quite as though she were talking to herself, she said grimly, "It was Rita and her crowd, of course. No wonder I didn't know the house when I never would go near any of them. Naturally they just guessed that last story wasn't true, and I was goose enough to prove it. Well, p'raps it serves me right."

"What under the sun are you talking about, Carol Heath?" demanded Jane. "I'm too curious for words."

Carol hesitated, and then shook her head significantly, for Susan Trot came hurrying in at that moment armed with bottles and bandages.

"I thought I'd never git here," she began apologetically. "Your ma wanted me to do something for the ladies, and I didn't have a chance to explain that I had a patient waiting for me." She said the last with a glint of the eye at Jane, as if to remind her of their delightful understanding.

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"Susan, you certainly have the nicest touch," Carol said gratefully. "That begins to feel better already." At that moment she wanted nothing so much as to be taken care of, and say pleasant things, and be sure that people liked her.

"You'd ought not to set that foot on the ground again to-night," decreed Miss Trot as she bathed and bandaged in an impressively expert manner. "There! Now I'll go and have Mr. Chope harness up Sally."

But failing to find Mr. Chope, and meeting David and Rob in the course of her search, another plan was proposed and the two boys came with a chair to bear their afflicted friend to her home.

"I'm afraid you'll drop me. I'm so heavy," said Carol, squirming a little in her anxiety.

"Heavy! By my halidom, maiden"—Rob had torn himself away from a Waverley novel to come over to see David—"you're but a feather-weight for sturdy varlets like us."

"Before I'd be called a varlet, Spinksy," taunted Jane, who as one of the relief party was dancing along in front, and walking backward half the time.

The boys rested once or twice before they finally set Carol down in front of the fireplace in the library, and helped her slip into a capacious arm-chair.

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"Just touch a match to the fire, please, David," she urged. "It isn't really cold enough to have it, but it looks so cheerful. Jane, there's a box of candy up in my room, and you've all got to stay till mother comes home."

Jane ran up-stairs for the candy and was back again in a moment. "I can't stay," she said breathlessly. "I told Susan not to begin on all those dishes, because I'd be back and wipe them for her."

"Well, you've got to stay a few minutes. The fire might go out, or a spark may fly on the rug, and it would hurt my ankle to have to jump," pleaded Carol artfully. "If you'll only stay," there was a sudden light in the dark eyes, a hint of color in the pale cheeks, "I'll tell you what happened to me this afternoon."

"I promised," faltered Jane, with an eye on her twin. "I ought not to stay."

"Probably some one else will help Miss Trot," observed David, so unexpectedly forsaking his post of guide and counselor, that the very shock of it strengthened his sister in the knowledge of what she should do.

"Jane, you can stay ten minutes and then run all the way," said Carol, and added surprisingly, "I won't let any of the Stuart family break a promise, but you've got to hear about this af-

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ternoon. It has just struck me how funny it was."

There never was any doubt that she could make anything seem amusing if she tried, though it wasn't easy to keep the funny side uppermost when, underneath everything, an insistent little voice kept saying, "Tell it just as it happened, but don't let them think you mind the least little bit."

"There were all those solemn things in sheets, and there was poor little Carol just quaking," she ended with her mirthful laugh. "And now they're probably crunching my perfectly good home-made candy and—and making fun of me. Ugh! I can't bear them." The last words came out with a force that took the sparkle from her eyes and made the corners of her mouth droop forlornly.

"Now, please don't tell any one I've told you," she entreated with another quick change of mood. "I'm going to behave to them as if it had never happened, and I'm not going to tell a single soul. That'll spoil part of their fun, anyway."

"Of course it will," said Jane, who had been listening with her eyes very big and her whole mind intent on the narrative. "And we won't tell a soul," she added, getting up from the rug, and pausing to push in a bit of charred wood which threatened to drop. "I think those girls

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are the meanest ever. It wasn't their place to do anything about it, if you don't always ——" She stopped suddenly and the color flew into her cheeks. "Well, anyway, we all know that you don't half expect ——"

"Oh, come on, Mrs. Janes. Those dishes are waiting," interrupted David sharply. It was rough on a girl to have a thing of that kind rubbed in more than once a day, he was telling himself.

"Wasn't that perfectly dreadful of me?" sighed Jane, as the three walked down the driveway together. "I was so thankful to have you cut in, Davy. There's no knowing what I might have said."

There was no answer from her twin, but Rob said soberly, "Girls can take it out of each other everlastingly when they want to, can't they? And the worst of it is that Carol's just going to hate them and pity herself. Probably she'll never know the least little bit in the world that for once in their lives they did her a good turn."

"Don't you be too sure." David felt that his experience with a twin had given him side-lights on a girl's feelings that Rob never could have. Besides, he had been the last to leave the room, and he had seen Carol's face when she thought she was alone.

CHAPTER XII

THE ENCHANTED PRINCESS

JANE had to decide by Friday morning whether she would or would not go to see Mary Brown, and though, in the intervening two days, she went through the process of making up her mind a dozen times, underneath it all she knew perfectly well what her final decision would be.

"It's really dreadful, mumsey, to belong to such a strong-minded family," she said as she slipped into her mother's room to kiss her good-bye before departing for school that morning. "Now, here it is a perfectly glorious out-of-door Friday, and we can't possibly have any more of 'em, and you haven't tried to persuade me to give up the walk, and Spinksy hasn't peeped on the subject, and yet if I shouldn't go to see Mary Brown I know ——"

"Know what, darling?" asked Mrs. Stuart as her daughter's rapid utterance came to an end for lack of breath.

"That you'd both think I was a 'quitter,'" announced Jane. "Oh, yes'm, that's slang," she went on before her mother could put in a word, "but you ought to allow me some special privilege

The Enchanted Princess

this morning, when I've made up my mind to try to live up to you and my twin. It would be so much easier for me if you'd only say, 'Now, Jane, you must do just what the doctor asks you or I shall put you in the closet,' or something like that. It's the way you make me responsible for myself that worries me."

Mother laughed just as her daughter knew she would. "You absurd child," she said softly, reaching up to pull Jane down into her lap; "who is going to cultivate your sense of responsibility if your mother doesn't? I'm sorry you've got to lose the walk, but you can come over to the little house afterward. And I do want you to help that poor girl."

"You remember, Janey," she added as Jane gave her a final hug and rose to her feet, "how you felt when you first came to Belhaven. And you haven't forgotten that you and Davy and I agreed that service counts for most in life after all."

"Why, so we did," assented Jane. "Mumsey, it's just like marching with the band playing when I talk to you. You make me want to get up and do things. And service is what my pretty girl at the concert believed in, and—and her Fritz, and the Marburgs. There's a nice crowd of us, isn't there, mother darling? I'm quite proud of myself to think I belong."

Jane Stuart's Chum

For a moment she gazed thoughtfully out of the window. "The trouble is," she said half dolefully, "that when I want to carry out those ideas I don't seem to have any luck at all. I've never really dared even to try to be serviceable since the day I lost the heirloom." The sigh with which she ended was heartfelt, if a trifle exaggerated, and her eyes were less cheerful.

"Having four lessons a week with Susan is something in the way of service, Janey," suggested mother. "You haven't missed a lesson yet, and many times it hasn't been easy for you."

"Why, mother, how did you know? I didn't suppose any one had noticed that." Jane was radiant again. "Well, I guess it's my 'serve' to Mary Brown all right, and I'm just everlastingly going to get it over the net and into the court," and, quite pleased with this metaphorical way of treating the subject, she started for school.

On her way she stopped to tell Dr. Reed that she would go, and his hearty gratitude made her ashamed to think she had been so slow in granting his request.

"You're a trump, Miss Jane Stuart; as much of a one as Polly thinks you are, which is saying a great deal." He paused for a moment and looked at her reflectively. "Don't worry about what you're going to say or do," he went on after a mo-

The Enchanted Princess

ment. "Only"—he hesitated so long that expectancy grew in Jane's eyes—"well, if I were you I shouldn't ask her any questions about her family or—or anything of that kind. Just let her tell you what she wants to tell, and you can describe the Belhaven girls and boys and their good times."

"All right, Dr. Reed. When it comes my turn to talk I'll make 'em all seem so entrancing that she'll want to see the others instead of me next time," answered Jane with her eyes dancing mischievously. "But I shall be sure to say something I ought not to say," she added.

"Don't feel troubled if you do. Perhaps it will help the poor child to be stirred up a bit. And, if you can, get her interested in what the young folks are doing."

Jane went on her way to school with her mind full of what the doctor had said. Something of her first interest in the girl was coming back, and it made the whole thing seem easier now that her curiosity was again aroused. "I wonder why her family isn't to be mentioned," she said to herself. "Perhaps—perhaps her father was in a bank and was dishonest." Which, from Jane's point of view, was one of the most dreadful things she could suspect.

The bracing, sunshiny morning, the talks with mother and Dr. Reed, her own high resolves had

Jane Stuart's Chum

put Jane into an exalted frame of mind in which her usual interest in her fellow-beings was increased by a vague desire to push the world along a little in the way she thought it ought to go.

Therefore, when Stanley Oliver came running out of his house, and she saw just ahead of her a group of the Dallas Street boys, whom Molly disliked, she made up her mind promptly to detain Molly's brother if she possibly could. Besides, mother had told her that she must try to be pleasant to Stanley because he so much needed all that the nice girls and boys could do for him.

"Oh, Stan," she said in her friendliest manner as he ran down the walk, and halted involuntarily to avoid running into her, "you've come just in time to save me from walking to school alone. I thought I was going to spoil my record."

Stanley looked decidedly cross and unresponsive, but as Jane unconsciously shifted her books from one arm to the other he took them from her, and fell into step.

"I've been trying for days to give you a message from mother," Jane hurried on, thanking her lucky stars for this same message which had popped into her memory just in the nick of time. "Mother told me to tell you that she thinks you're a perfect wonder about sewing-machines. Hers has worked like a charm since you fixed it the last time."

The Enchanted Princess

"That was easy. Nothing of that kind ever feazes me." Stanley's manner was sullen, but held enough of its customary importance to shake Jane's helpful spirit a little. She held on to herself stoutly, however, and tried to think of something interesting to say, wondering, meanwhile, why this boy, really six months older, should always seem to her younger than herself.

"When's the new teacher coming?" Stanley asked gloomily, after a moment's silence. "Gee whiz! I hate to see old Mr. Wells turned out just to make room for that young fellow."

Jane knew that he had persisted in this view of the case in spite of the fact that the older teacher couldn't be persuaded not to resign. She also knew that Stanley had been very much in the habit of sliding out of his lessons with Mr. Wells whenever he could manage it, and it wasn't surprising that he regretted his departure. Far be it from her, however, to suggest anything of that kind on a morning like this.

"Mr. Prescott's coming after the Thanksgiving vacation," she said brightly. "Rob says that if Belhaven likes him and he likes the town he's going to bring his family here later."

"Hope he doesn't. He got in wrong with me, all right, and I shan't forget it."

"Oh, Stanley, how silly. It makes you seem

Jane Stuart's Chum

like a perfect baby to say that. Mr. Prescott wasn't trying to spy on us. He was just—why, just entering into the fun that night." For the moment Jane was off guard, and the words poured out with her usual impetuosity. Then the spirit of the morning enfolded her again, and her voice lost its scornful tone. "I believe you're going to like him some time," she said, and then with a quick change to what she hoped would be a safe subject, "Where's Molly? I haven't seen her anywhere this morning."

"I wish I hadn't. She's made me everlastingly mad," admitted Stan sulkily. "She teased father into saying that I can't go to the city with the boys next Wednesday. I was hurrying to catch up and tell them when I ran into you."

"Oh, those boys." Stanley's glance had indicated the Dallas Street boys who were going up the schoolhouse steps at that moment, and Jane knew that her tone and manner said much that she would have been wiser to keep back.

"Yes, those boys," mimicked Stanley snappishly. "Oh, I know they're not quite so high-toned as Rob and David and—and—Donald, but they've got some go in them, and I like them."

There was a covert sneer in his tone which made Jane long to talk back. Fortunately for her they were almost at the door of the high school, and

The Enchanted Princess

she managed to stifle the words that wanted to come, and to thank him for carrying her books. Then she went thoughtfully up the stairs with her cheeks burning, her mind less peaceful than it had been.

It was a good morning, nevertheless. Jane's lessons went unusually well, and, when the whole school assembled for the Friday "last hour," her latest theme was unexpectedly read aloud by the teacher in charge, and commended as a very praiseworthy performance. Jane glowed with pleasure over that. She knew mother would be pleased, and she could see her twin giving her a shy glance of approval from across the big assembly room.

In spite of this, however, she felt her high spirits sag a little when she was doing her hair over before starting to see Mary Brown.

"I'm a flat failure when I try to help people," she said to herself meekly as she hesitated between a brown ribbon and a green one, and finally chose the latter. "I s'pose Stan is still wondering why I absolutely forced him to walk with me this morning." This last thought made her laugh a little, and she felt better.

She wouldn't consciously try to make things easier for Mary Brown or Dr. Reed, her mind ran on. She would go to the bayberry-candle house

Jane Stuart's Chum

as if she were storming an enchanted castle where a beautiful princess awaited release. "Mary Brown would make a dandy princess, wouldn't she?" She was talking to the bright face in the mirror as though it belonged to some one else, and it smiled back at her at the idea of turning poor mournful Mary Brown into anything beautiful or enchanted. "You know you never could go adventuring that way without Spinksy, and you're getting pretty old for imagining things like that," she ended, giving the green bow a last little twitch, and going to wash her hands.

Nevertheless it was in an absurdly youthful state of mind that Jane left the house, and meeting Rob just outside found him surprisingly responsive to her fancies.

"I didn't know that you could imagine things like that," she said as after wonderful and perilous adventures they reached the neighborhood of the house to which Jane was going. "I thought Spinksy was the only boy on earth who would play that way, and he wouldn't do it with any one but me."

Rob laughed and looked a little red and conscious. "Well, I can't say I'm in the habit nowadays of slaying wild animals and escaping my enemies," he confessed somewhat shamefacedly, "but I used to be great for it when I was a kid.

The Enchanted Princess

And of course when I'm with a child I have to play the way she likes."

"Of course," answered Jane, purposely disappointing him by taking this with perfect calmness. "Always remember that when you play with me, please. And now I'm Jane Stuart going to see Mary Brown, and I'm scared stiff."

She ended with a sudden little shiver which was more than half real, and Rob couldn't help laughing at her doleful face.

"Brace up, Lady Jane," he said, lowering his voice mysteriously. "Now that you've got my imagination started I more than half believe that she is an enchanted princess, and that it's up to you to break the spell. You have my blessing, anyway. Are you coming over to the House in the Woods later?"

"Yes, if I don't stay too long here. It's a perfectly glorious day for a walk, isn't it?"

There was an unconsciously wistful note in Jane's voice as she said the last words that made Rob wish that Mary Brown were miles away. "Oh, well, there'll be lots of other walks," he said hastily. "And it isn't every one who can visit an E. P.!"

"What's that? Oh, I know—enchanted princess, of course. Well, see you later—perhaps. If any one brings marshmallows, do save me some.

Jane Stuart's Chum

Now—one, two, three—go!” and Jane shot up the path as though propelled by some outward force.

“Who would ever have thought that Rob would like an imagination game?” she was saying to herself as she rang the door-bell. “I must tell Spinksy that.”

The old-fashioned bell jangled under Jane's vigorous grasp, and, to her fancy, seemed to have harshly broken the silence which encompassed the house. “Mercy! I hope she won't think I'm too violent,” she thought apprehensively, and then straightened herself to meet the person whom she heard approaching.

It was a stout girl, with a pleasant, rather stupid face, who opened the door and admitted Jane into a small hall, not very light, from which the stairs ascended abruptly.

“You can go right up,” she said without waiting for Jane to speak. “She's expectin' you.” And then, to Jane's consternation, she turned her back and vanished into a room on the right of the hall, closing the door behind her. A second later the heavy shutting of another door proclaimed a still farther flight, and Jane stood helpless for a moment, wondering whether she should pursue the girl, or venture up-stairs without further direction.

Then the funny side of it struck her. “I'd give anything if Rob could see me now,” she thought.

The Enchanted Princess

"It's such a joke on me. Well, I've got to hunt for the princess, and I only hope I shan't meet one of Mr. Chope's 'double-header dragons' before I find her."

Jane went softly up the steep stairs which would creak in spite of her best efforts, but, to her perplexity, their warning was unheeded and the two doors in the upper hall remained closed.

She waited a moment, wondering whimsically whether in enchanted palaces it was proper to look through the keyholes, or put one's ear against the door. Then she tried the trusty formula which had so often served her.

"My mother tells me to take this one," she said in her mind, emphasizing the words with a slender finger and ending with the door on the left. Somehow, even the word mother seemed to illumine the situation a little, and Jane began to feel quite in the spirit for adventure, and rather glad, on the whole, that she didn't know which room enclosed the princess.

She knocked softly on the left-hand door, behind which silence brooded, and waited patiently for what seemed to her a long time. Then she knocked again, a little louder.

This time there was a short, trotting step across the floor, and the door opened a crack to disclose the cheerful, pink and white face of the old lady

Jane Stuart's Chum

whose relationship to Mary Brown Jane had not yet been able to determine. She was blinking as though suddenly roused from a nap, and for an instant did not recognize Jane. Then her face beamed, and the door was opened wide.

"Why, it's my 'sunshine girl,'" she said, putting out both her hands. "I didn't know you were the one who was coming to see Mary. Oh, dear, I wish to goodness I could ask you to step right in and set down, but Mary's waitin', and she gave me to understand that she wanted you all to herself."

The old lady gazed at her with such longing in her blue eyes, and held the door open so hospitably, that Jane could hardly resist the temptation to make her call here instead of at the other end of the hall.

"What a lovely bright room," she said involuntarily, noticing how the afternoon sunlight poured in at the windows, lighting up a gilded bird-cage, and falling in rainbow patches on one of the walls.

"That's my chopped-up rainbow," explained the old lady following Jane's glance. "I like to think it's kind of a special Providence, granted to me because I'm so set on light and color, but really, I know"—her bright eyes twinkled humorously, and Jane heard again the soft laugh which made

The Enchanted Princess

her smile in sympathy—"I know that it comes from them old glass candlesticks.

"But I mustn't keep you here a minute," she went on, looking beyond Jane toward the door opposite her own. "Mary'll hear us, and I don't want her to be put out with you before you get in there. You knock on the door, and she'll answer."

The old lady laid an appealing hand on her arm as Jane turned away. "You'll be real patient with her, won't you, dearie?" she said anxiously. "Jest remember that's she a poor child that's had altogether too many trials for one of her age. And then, too"—she hesitated, and the blue eyes grew very soft and full of pity—"perhaps the right sort of a disposition wasn't given to her in the first place."

Jane nodded sympathetically, but her mind was busy with wild speculation as she crossed the hall and knocked on the right-hand door. What sort of trials, she wondered, and was the girl really poor, and what under the sun should she, herself, say first?

When she opened the door in response to a faint "Come in," her own embarrassment was almost forgotten in the immediate certainty that the girl awaiting her was much more shy than she herself. The room seemed close and dark in comparison

Jane Stuart's Chum

with the air and brightness of out-of-doors, but in spite of the dimness Jane could see that the girl on the couch was gazing at her with strange intentness, and that her breath was coming and going quickly.

"I believe you're almost as scared as I am," Jane said, narrowly missing a collision with a footstool in her progress across the room, and in her effort to avoid it running violently into a chair.

"Isn't it silly?" By this time she was beside the couch, and had taken the limp hand the girl half extended to her.

"I suppose it is," Mary Brown answered with so unsuccessful an attempt at a smile that Jane hardly knew whether it was meant for one. "But I can't help it. Can you?"

"I'm not a bit scared now. You don't look dangerous. At least in this light you don't. And I shouldn't think you could see how really terrible I am." Jane ended with a jolly laugh. She knew she was talking nonsense, but she couldn't think of anything else to say, and along with the other feelings of the afternoon had come the determination to get on with this girl in some way.

"It is dark here. Perhaps—would you mind putting up one of the shades?"

Thankful even for this concession, Jane hastened to comply, and lingered a moment involun-

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tarily, for two of the Snowshoe Sisters were going by on their way to the House in the Woods. "It's perfectly glorious out-of-doors," she said, turning back to the couch to find the girl's eyes fixed on her in the same intent way. "If you were only well I'd like to take you for a walk." Then, as a little commotion among the wrappings at the end of the couch turned her gaze in that direction, she went on rapturously, "Why, there's your darling dog! It was so dark I didn't see him before."

In response to Jane's petting touch the tiny creature waked, ran toward her, and did his excited best to kiss her with his small pink tongue. Mary Brown snatched him jealously and hugged him until he gave a sharp, protesting bark.

"Oh, darling! Did I hurt him?" she cried with a warmth of which Jane would not have believed her capable. "Peter, you shan't love any one as much as you do me. He's the only thing in the world that really likes me." She cuddled the small creature under her arm, and he went off to sleep again.

"You told me that when I met you before, but I think your grand—your aunt—seems very fond of you," ventured Jane, feeling that the conversational road was beset with difficulties.

"Oh, Brownie. Well, perhaps she does. She must a little or she'd never be willing to have me

Jane Stuart's Chum

live with her. She's not obliged to, you know. She isn't my aunt or my grandmother. She's just 'dear Miss Brown.' ” There was again a half smile on the girl's face as she brought out the plain little name with the affectionate adjective before it.

“ I thought—because your names were the same—that she must be your aunt,” Jane faltered, trying to rid herself of the fatal impulse to talk about family.

Mary Brown gave her a quick glance that was almost defiant. “ I can't see that it proves anything if our names are alike,” she said sharply, and then as if a little ashamed, “ there might be plenty of Stuarts, I suppose, who wouldn't be any relation to you.”

“ Of course,” Jane conceded hastily, glad to be on safe ground again. She was thankful that she needn't be afraid to talk about her own family as much as she pleased. “ Davy and I haven't even one own cousin. But our second or—or third step-cousin, we never can decide just what he really is, seems almost like a brother to us. I wonder if you have ever seen him go by here.”

“ I don't know. The tall boy who looks so much like you is your brother, isn't he? ”

“ My twin,” corrected Jane with modest pride.

“ And your mother is the little lady. I can't

The Enchanted Princess

see much of her because the girls and boys all crowd around her."

"She is. But how did you know so much about us?"

Mary Brown actually laughed a little at Jane's wide-eyed astonishment. "Brownie told me. She's made friends with the old man who does your garden work."

"Oh, Mr. Chope. Why, he never told me that he knew her." Jane was manifestly surprised at this news about Mr. Chope, who had been more enterprising than any one had suspected.

"I wonder if you know who any of the others are," she went on with a sudden inspiration, and, without waiting for an answer, launched boldly into an attempt to identify the different girls and boys of the Snowshoe Club, and tell something of their good times.

"I'm quite sure I know which one she is," said the other girl, eagerly interrupting Jane's description of Carol. "She's the small, pretty, dark-haired girl who always walks as though her shoes were too thin."

Jane gasped a little at this, but had to laugh, for Carol could never be persuaded to wear proper shoes when she went for a country walk.

"That's the very one. She was my first girl friend in Belhaven, and we got acquainted one

Jane Stuart's Chum

stormy afternoon when it seemed to me I should just give up if I couldn't have a girl to chum with. Don't you feel that way sometimes?"

"I've never had girls to chum with. I've never been to school. I didn't even know girls and boys could have such good times together." Mary Brown ended with a forlorn sigh, and looked gloomily at Jane, whose sympathy responded at once to so direful a state of affairs as this.

"Never been to school and had fun with other girls? How perfectly dreadful! Do get well right away and come out and play with us. And please let me bring some of the girls in to see you." Jane's words poured out with her usual impetuosity, but before she ended she could see that the girl on the sofa was shrinking deeper into the cushions, and that the distressed look had come back into her eyes.

"Oh, I couldn't—I couldn't possibly," she said in a stifled voice. "It was all I could do to make up my mind to see ——" She stopped suddenly and a dull color crept into her cheeks. "Oh, I ought not to have said that when you have been so nice to me. And you must have hated me because I was so horrid about Peter that night you found him."

"I've never thought of that once this afternoon,"



“NOW, LOOK AT ME”

The Enchanted Princess

Jane said with convincing honesty. "That's all over now, and we'll begin from to-day. Are you going to let me come again soon?" Earlier in the day Jane would not have believed that she could be asking this question so cheerfully, but, by this time, her courage had risen with the difficulties of the situation.

"Do you mean—do you really mean that you want to come again?" the other girl asked so wistfully that all Jane's generous instincts responded instantly.

"Wait. Don't tell me yet," the girl went on quickly. "Please pull up the other shades—up to the top of the window." She waited until Jane had done as she asked, then said anxiously, "Now, look at me, and see if you still want to come again."

Jane gazed half fearfully. She didn't know what she expected to see, but to her great relief she couldn't find anything which should make this girl afraid to be looked at. It was not a particularly attractive face, because it looked unhealthy and sad, but all that could be changed, Jane told herself wisely.

"I don't know what you mean, or whether you're making fun of me," she said at last, and at sight of her satisfying smile the other face grew a bit more cheerful. "But anyway, I like you

Jane Stuart's Chum

better with the shades up, so please never have 'em down when I'm here. And I'll surely come again soon if you want me."

Before the other girl had a chance to reply there was a sudden knock at the door, and the maid whom Jane had seen before announced that Miss Jane Stuart's mother had sent for her.

"I must go," said Jane, jumping up so suddenly that she startled Peter, who staggered to his feet with a sharp bark, and looked around for enemies.

"Good-bye, you darling Peter. Don't forget that you and I are friends. Good-bye, Mary." Jane brought out the name with a little difficulty. For some reason "Mary Brown" didn't seem to fit this strange, sad-looking girl at all. "Please remember that I'm your first Belhaven friend. And just as soon as you will I want you to get acquainted with my family, and Polly, and Serena and the others."

For an instant the girl's two thin hands held Jane's tightly. "I shall be satisfied with just one friend, if it's you. And I really believe you mean it," she said with a slow brightening of her somber eyes. "But I shan't keep asking you to come," she went on hastily. "I shall know that if you really like me you'll want to come."

There was a wistfulness in her voice and expression which made Jane uncomfortable. "Oh,

The Enchanted Princess

of course, I'm coming," she answered quickly, but as she left the room she couldn't help making up a little face. "There I am again," she said to herself ruefully, "left on my own responsibility. It's really worse than ever," and then she ran down the narrow stairs to find Rob in the hall being entertained with cookies and conversation by Miss Brown.

"Boys always did like my cookies," announced the latter with great satisfaction. "I didn't know as they'd suit the Belhaven taste, though." Then as she held the plate out to Jane, "It was awful kind of you to come," she said with some anxiety in her voice. "I know it ain't very pleasant for a young thing like you to stay in a dark room, but I do hope if you can manage it you'll come again soon."

"The next time the shades won't be down," Jane exulted, "and I really think she likes me a little bit. These cookies are great. I must get you to give me your recipe for them. Will you?"

"My dear, if you'll help me make Mary happier I'll bake a barrel of cookies for you," said the old lady, with tears in her bright eyes. "I'm bound ——"

"So am I. Oh, I beg your pardon for interrupting, but I'm sure we mean the same thing, and I'll do my very ——" Jane's rapid speech came

Jane Stuart's Chum

to an end with a little gasp as she made a heroic effort to steer a cooky crumb in the proper direction. Suddenly her hand met that of "dear Miss Brown" in a friendly clasp. "We understand, don't we?" she said in a choked voice.

"Your mother told me I might come and get you," explained Rob as they started toward the woods. "We all thought you'd stayed too long for a first call. And there are exactly four girls and three boys waiting to toast marshmallows for you."

"My, but that sounds good," sighed Jane. "Will you please make everything very light and bright, and say all the funny foolish things you can, and all laugh and laugh?"

"Was it so bad as that? Didn't you break the spell at all?"

"Well, perhaps." Jane, happily conscious now that mother and David and a good time awaited her, was willing to concede something. "It's—it's a very strong spell, Rob, but I believe—I really do believe I cracked it."

CHAPTER XIII

ENTER THE CONCERT GIRL

DURING the next three weeks several important entries were made in Jane's little diary. On the twenty-eighth of November she wrote :

“ Beautiful day. First German lesson from Mr. Prescott. I never can learn to pronounce ‘ch’ the way he does.”

A week later came the news :

“ Weather horrid. Went to see Mary Brown, and both shades were up. She let Peter sit with me for some time. The crack widens ! ”

Later still :

“ Mr. Prescott has rented the little house near us. He is going to have a school glee club. When his sister comes she will play for us. Stanley won't be in anything that Mr. Prescott gets up. Goosander ! Molly feels dreadfully about it. Mary went to walk with me, but I had to promise to go where we wouldn't be likely to see people. She's really very interesting sometimes.”

At last, one Friday afternoon, about ten days be-

Jane Stuart's Chum

fore Christmas, the long-looked-for initiation of Jane and Carol into the Ninepin Club took place, and ended with piping hot chocolate at the House in the Woods. Mrs. Stuart was there with her sewing, and two or three of the boys strolled in with a cheerful pretense of not knowing that a feast was in progress, and required to be warmly urged before consenting to stay.

"What under the sun were you doing, Jane, when I met you on Center Street about two hours ago?" demanded Donald, offering his cousin wafers to go with her chocolate. She and Carol as the guests of honor were seated on the roomy couch, and though both looked weary, there was an air of satisfaction, even of triumph, about them.

"Two hours ago?" Jane questioned vaguely, lifting her eyes from the foam-heaped cup. "Two hours ago? I'm sorry, Don, but meeting you didn't make the slightest impression on me. What did I seem to be doing? I've done so many ridiculous things this afternoon."

"You were carrying ——"

Jane's hearty laugh stopped Donald midway. "I was carrying Millicent Isabel to Dr. Reed to have her pulse and temperature taken," she explained. "That was Serena's old doll, and she's almost as big as Judy. The doctor says she's in a dreadful condition."

Enter the Concert Girl

"Before that," she continued, "Carol and I spent ages doing foolish things, and then they sent me to the Gift Shop to inquire if they kept stove-blackening. I didn't mind that, but I didn't like having to ask at the post-office if I could rent a yeast-cake," she ended pensively.

"That wasn't half so bad as making me go to the provision-store and ask if I could buy a rabbit to make a Welsh rarebit with," complained Carol. "It sounded dreadfully ignorant."

"Don't you care," said David, taking her cup to be filled again. "Every one nowadays knows what initiations are."

"Anyway, I'm glad it's over." In Carol's sigh there was a memory of a past experience which had not yet ceased to rankle. True to her resolve she had treated Rita Hastings and the other girls she suspected as though nothing had happened to change the capricious acquaintanceship she had always accorded them. As the story leaked out, she had taken the teasing which followed with such apparent good-humor that no one cared to keep it up for long. But underneath everything, two desires struggled within her; one the wish to get even; the other, a sometimes fervent, sometimes faint idea that to be dependable would be worth working for.

"Now there are eight little Ninepins," said

Jane Stuart's Chum

Molly, "and there isn't a girl I know of that I should want for the ninth."

"I can't think of a soul," murmured Serena, who was popping corn before the open fire.

"Perhaps some one will move here," Jane suggested hopefully. "I did."

"Not every one who moved here could be one, Lady Jane," said Polly with a laugh. "We're very particular pickers and choosers."

Jane slid off the couch and made a courtsey for the implied compliment. "Let me shake the corn-popper for a while, Serena. Your cheeks are just blazing, and I feel I ought to do something to deserve the nice thing Polly said."

"If you have a helpful spirit there'll be plenty of chance for you," Molly observed wisely. "Girls, this is the last year I can ever be a Junior Ninepin, and I'm going to be a very strict and strenuous president. To-morrow there's a regular meeting at my house, and we've got to decide what we'll do for Miss Rachel's children."

"Who's Miss Rachel?" demanded Jane.

"Miss Rachel Hooper, who used to live in Belhaven," Polly explained. "Now she lives in Boston, and she runs a little bakery where poor people can get home-made things at reasonable prices."

"And she has a club of about ten girls and boys," added Marian. "And for the last three

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years the J. N. P.'s have done something for them in the Christmas holidays."

"How perfectly fine." Jane turned to her mother with shining eyes. "Aren't you glad I belong to this club, mumsey? And now you won't mind, will you, if I tell you that I stepped on my dress and tore an awful, jagged tear? I've been waiting for just the proper minute to break the news."

Mrs. Stuart laughed with the others. "I suppose we shall have to make allowance for a certain amount of wear and tear," she said philosophically, "but why, oh, why, did you choose the very front of your skirt?"

"She can't help it. She's so straightforward," remarked Rob, who had just strolled in from the other room, where he had beaten in an absorbing game of chess.

"Well, Janey, considering that we have that to mend we must be going home. It's four o'clock, anyway, and time for us to get started."

Mrs. Stuart's departure was the signal for the girls, and, as they often did on Friday afternoons, the boys locked up the little house, and all walked home together through the winter twilight. It had been a bright, cold December day, but as yet there had been no lasting fall of snow. The path through the woods was by this time worn broad

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and smooth by the tramp of many feet, and some weeks before this the boys had built a permanent and substantial bridge across the little brook.

Walking by the bayberry-candle house Jane looked somewhat anxiously at the windows. "I must find time to run in there to-morrow," she murmured, hardly meaning to speak aloud.

Rob, walking beside her, heard the murmured remark, and answered in the same low tone, "How's the E. P., Jane, and did the crack go any deeper?"

"Oh, I don't know. Sometimes I think it did, but it's still a perfectly good spell, and likely to last for a long time, I'm afraid." Jane shook her head with an air of discouragement. "Do you know," she went on confidentially, "I'm really getting so I rather like her, and that makes me all the more anxious to break the horrid old spell. Once in a while when I go there I get quite excited because I think I'm really making some progress, and the next time it's just as if she had built up a high, thick wall between us."

"Why do you bother about her, then?" questioned Carol, who had come up unobserved and slipped her arm through Jane's. "Oh, I know perfectly well you're talking about that Mary Brown, and I can't see why you waste your time over her. You're much too good to her, I think."

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"It isn't goodness," Jane retorted. "I—I s'pose it isn't badness, either, but it's really mostly because I hate to fail when I start out to do anything. And after that first time I went to see her I thought I was going to do great things, and I promised myself and—and dear Miss Brown."

"What makes you call her that?" Carol asked a little snappishly.

"Because it was the first really pleasant thing I heard Mary say, and because it fits her to perfection. She's the dearest, cheerfulest thing. Each time I go to see Mary," Jane went on thoughtfully, "I think I'm going to persuade her to come and meet the rest of you, but—not at all. She's sure to slip out of it in some way, though she's getting awfully interested in every one of you. When it does happen you've all got to stand by me and make her feel comfortable."

"Carol and I will be our most delightful selves," promised Rob. "Miss Mary Brown will be so charmed she'll be sorry for all the time she has wasted."

Carol's expression was not propitious, but she said nothing, and only clung a little more closely to Jane's arm.

"Hello!" said Rob, as they came out on the street on which the Stuarts lived, and halted for a moment in front of a small house already cheer-

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fully alight. "Mr. Prescott's at it, as usual. Just hear him hammer."

Mingled with the ringing strokes of the hammer came the sound of a tuneful voice singing a German folk-song, and Mrs. Stuart coming up with the others lingered to listen. When the last note died away there was a burst of applause from the group outside, and at the sound the singer appeared at the window.

"It is so warm in here I have left my window open," he called. "Come in—come in and see my book-shelves." In another instant a flood of light streamed through the open doorway, and Frederick Prescott beamed hospitably upon them.

"You will like my book-shelves, I hope, Mrs. Stuart," he said, ushering her into the little front room where a fire glowed in the fireplace. "I have the fire to dry the walls which I have myself papered," he explained with evident pride. "Next week comes our furniture, and I shall arrange it so well as I can. My grandfather and sister are visiting a friend for two weeks, and I have the wish to make this house homelike for them."

"The book-shelves are fine," said Mrs. Stuart admiringly. "Did you really put them up yourself?"

"I have. And the paper—you have not perhaps noticed the paper?" Mr. Prescott's manner

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was modest, but he laughed as the question left his lips. "You will think me a very conceited person, nicht wahr?" he said with the charm which had already won the hearts of almost all his pupils. "Well, perhaps I am. One thinks more of doing what he has supposed he cannot do. And I am so anxious to have things right for Hilda—for my little sister."

"What a lovely name! And what pretty paper!" Jane was gazing about her with the quick appreciation which was always her response to anything that pleased her eye. Then a daring thought struck her. "When are you going to paint those shelves? Couldn't I help? I love to put paint on anything."

"Oh, Jane, I should be afraid to have you try it," protested her mother. "But if you'll let us, Mr. Prescott, we'll come over and wash the dishes when they are unpacked, and make the china closet ready for Miss Hilda. Shall we have a settling-party next week, girls?" she ended, looking around only to meet instant approval in all the faces.

"We'll help unpack if Mr. Prescott will let us, and then you and the girls can arrange things," said Rob. "May we, Mr. Prescott?"

"Ach! That will gif me the greatest bleasure," responded the young man, becoming very German

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all at once in his evident gratitude. He was standing where the light fell full upon his boyish, friendly face, and David wondered for the hundredth time why certain boys at the school did their best to make life hard for him.

"And if you will permit Miss Jane and her brother to come in to-morrow," Frederick Prescott went on, "she shall have a chance to try her hand at painting if she likes."

"If I like!" Jane cried rapturously. "I've never painted anything but a garden chair before—now, Spinksy—don't you dare tell that it never dried properly. I'm wild to try something else. Don't you—don't you just love the way painters slap their brushes down?"

"Mother, I think we ought to take Mrs. Janes home," said David solemnly. "She'll have paint all over this house if we don't look out."

The painting of the shelves next day proved to be even more interesting than Jane had anticipated, for while she worked under Mr. Prescott's direction he told her stories of Germany and of famous artists. Polly was there, too, and Carol wandered in. David and his inseparables, Rob and Donald, who prided themselves on their ability as carpenters, went briskly about with hammers and screw-drivers, and looked, so Carol told them, more important than they really were. In the

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back yard Kenneth was playing the part of Hercules cleaning the Augean stables, with Mr. Chope as an ever faithful aid and inspirer.

The settling-party was planned for the next Friday. Mrs. Stuart suggested that they should all work as long as they could in the afternoon, and come to her house for supper. Then if they needed to go back for an hour in the evening it would be an easy matter.

For the first four afternoons of the following week Mr. Prescott and the boys worked with such good result that by Friday the repair work was finished, the little house was swept and clean from top to bottom, and the furniture unpacked.

Like a good general Mrs. Stuart divided her forces into detachments. There were pictures to be wiped and hung, books to be dusted and set on the shelves, dishes to be washed and put in the closets.

"It's much better fun washing your neighbor's dishes," said Serena wielding a dish-mop with a capable air. "How does the closet look, girls?"

"Perfectly fine, and the books are standing in rows like soldiers, and Jane and Mr. Prescott are wandering around with their eyes half shut so's to get a proper view of the pictures." Carol, who had come into the kitchen to get a drink, paused to look at Serena with admiring eyes.

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"That pink apron is the most becoming thing I ever saw you wear, Serena Holt. You can certainly have me when you wear that."

Serena laughed. "Why haven't you an apron? What are you doing?" she asked.

"Oh, I? Why, I'm chief inspector. There has to be some one to keep 'em all going, so I appointed myself."

"Lazy thing," commented Polly. "Say, Carol, has Molly come yet?"

Carol shook her head, and the two other girls exchanged a disappointed glance.

"I'm afraid she won't then, and it's all on account of that wretched Stanley," Polly scolded. "What does make him so hateful?"

"Mother says it's because he thinks that your crowd doesn't like him, and those other boys flatter him," said an unexpected voice so near Carol's shoulder that she jumped. It was Judy Stuart, who had slipped in by way of the back door to see how things were going, and had plunged at once into what seemed to her an interesting conversation.

"She says she thinks he wants to be nicer sometimes, but he probably doesn't know how to begin. I heard her talking to Jane and Donald and David about it." Judy was yielding without much resistance to the temptation to make herself interesting

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to those older girls. "Mother said that when you got into the habit of being mean and selfish it was much easier to keep on than to stop, but Jane and Davy don't think Stanley wants to be different."

"He needn't be so mean to Molly, anyway," said Serena, as Judy, having said all she could think of, drifted away to inspect the rest of the house. "She gives up everything to him."

"I wonder if that's the reason," questioned Polly thoughtfully. Then she laughed. "It doesn't seem to have much effect on Mr. Prescott, does it, to have Stan and those Dallas Street boys fairly tearing their hair to think up something to bother him? He's so busy trying to teach us and help everybody that he doesn't even know it when people are not nice to him."

"He's a perfect lamb," remarked Carol as if that settled the question. "I only hope his sister will be one quarter as nice. Really, girls, I don't think you're working as fast as you should," she ended in an official manner. "I must go and look after the other departments."

At half-past six when they all left to go to Mrs. Stuart's for supper there was a charming air of homelikeness about the house which filled them with admiration.

"You don't need to bother 'bout lockin' up, Mr. Prescott," called Mr. Chope, opening the

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kitchen door to look at the gay group just departing. "I've got my job laid out tinkerin' this range to make it go right, and I'll keep house till you git here agin."

Kenneth looked back with longing. There were possibilities even in a kitchen stove when Mr. Chope set his imagination to work upon it, and he was not sure that he might not be missing something. But then Judy and he were to help Susan Trot wait on table, and that in itself was a novelty.

"Everything tastes so good when you work hard," said Carol with a virtuous air, gratefully accepting her third biscuit, and looking up in mild surprise at the storm of protest which greeted her remark.

"Aw, Carol, I didn't see you do a thing." Kenneth, taking her very seriously, stopped in his serving of biscuits to argue the point, and was sharply urged on his way by Judy, who was following with creamed potatoes.

"Why, Ken, have you hurt your foot? What makes you limp?" demanded mother, who had been watching her son's progress around the table.

Kenneth stopped, looked at Judy, and turned very red. "Why, Mr. Chope said—he said ——" he swallowed hard and took a fresh start. "Mr. Chope said," he repeated, "that Judy and I could

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play we were Heeb and Grannymede; and you know Grannymede was carried off by an eagle, and it hurt his foot."

Something in his appealing eagerness averted the threatened laughter, and, for an instant, the older girls and boys looked almost too solemn.

"Come here, my Hebe, and give me some of thy potatoes," said Mr. Prescott, breaking the silence. "I did not know before that I was present at an Olympian banquet, but so it is."

"I choose to be Mars," Rob said suddenly. "Red hair—fiery temper, the God of war for mine. On, Ganymede, with your biscuits. If you don't get around to me soon I shall have a battle right here."

"Ken, I told you it wasn't 'Granny,' but you wouldn't believe me." Judy's remark was audible to the entire company.

"Well, if the best-tempered boy in the crowd is going to be Mars, I'm going to be Diana," said Carol. "You know how I perfectly love out-of-door sports."

"Davy ought to be Mercury," suggested Judy, "because he's always doing errands for somebody."

"And I'm just like quicksilver in my nature," remarked David with an appreciative grin. "Where does Jane come in?"

"Oh, she's Venus, of course," decreed Kenneth, so completely absorbed in this delightful game

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that he set the plate of biscuits on a chair and forgot all about them. "You have to have some one that's awfully good-looking for that."

"Why, Ken," expostulated his sister, blushing to the waving locks on her forehead, and jumping up from her chair. "Mother, I'm positive I heard the door-bell a few minutes ago. We were making such a noise—but I'd better see," and with the delighted laughter of the others ringing in her ears Jane made her escape.

Almost at the same instant the swinging door from the kitchen was pushed open, and held by Miss Trot, who was evidently trying to encourage some one to enter.

"Come right in," she was saying; "he's here, and they'll all be tickled to death to see you."

There was a moment of hesitation on the part of some one, and then a girl, a pretty girl with brown hair and lovely brown eyes, came shyly into the dining-room.

"I—I beg your pardon," she stammered, looking straight at Mrs. Stuart. "They told me my brother was here."

At the moment of her entrance there had been a delighted exclamation from Mr. Prescott, who was on the other side of the room, and by the time she had finished speaking he was at her side with hands on her shoulders.

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"Hilda, why have you changed your plans?" he asked, holding her off to look at her, and then giving her a hearty kiss. "Grandfather is not ill?"

"No. But we had to come without any warning. I'll explain later. But, Frederick, you have made the house lovely for us. A nice old man told me where to find you, and said he would stay while I was away. And as for grandfather—well, I left him counting over his set of Scott, so you can see he's all right."

And then Miss Hilda Prescott stopped for breath, and remembered where she was, and turned with a blushing apology to be introduced to Mrs. Stuart.

At this moment Jane opened the door from the front hall, and having given herself time to recover from the embarrassment of her young brother's unexpected compliment, was quite herself again.

"Nobody there," she began airily. "I even went out and looked around the end of the piazza." Then, seeing the stranger for the first time, she stopped short, and stared with perplexity, doubt and, at last, joyous recognition in her gaze.

"Why, it's my concert girl!" she exclaimed, starting at once across the room and meeting Hilda Prescott half-way.

"It's my sister," Frederick Prescott explained with an air of great pride; "she has come unex-

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pectedly, but, thanks to you all, I am ready for her."

"Oh, but it can't be—you must be mistaken," faltered Jane, conscious how foolish this must sound, but quite unable to keep from saying it. "Her brother's name was Fritz. But—but she did say he was an artist, and that he was quite German—I mean that he had lived in Germany for a long time."

Frederick Prescott laughed with the others. "Fritz is the German of it, you see," he said happily. "And I know I do not speak like an American, but you will all teach me. And now, Hilda, we should go to find grandfather." He paused in surprise as he turned to his sister, for she was searching eagerly in the bag she still carried, and talking apparently to herself.

"It's been in here ever since we left Marston," she murmured. "Here it is—no, that's mine—ah, at last," and with a smile of triumph Miss Hilda Prescott dangled before Jane's astonished eyes the lost "heirloom."

Jane gazed at her in speechless amazement. No one knew how the loss of little Aunt Jane's bag had weighed upon her spirits, nor what it meant to her to see again the heavy silver chain, the cherubs with their puffy cheeks, the smooth, linked surface.

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"Oh," she said with tears of gladness filling her eyes, "where did you find it?"

"In my grandfather's suit-case—the day we left Marston," answered Hilda; "but how it got there I don't know. The last time he used his suit-case he unpacked it himself and put it away, and I, carelessly, didn't look at it. In consequence he hunted for weeks for a book he thought he had lost, and I couldn't find some of his handkerchiefs. When I came to pack the suit-case I found the other things—and this.

"Grandfather couldn't imagine how it got there," Hilda continued, "and I knew right away that I had seen it, or one like it, but I couldn't tell where until just as I saw you."

"I believe I've met your grandfather," said Jane in a queer, choked voice. She was hugging the precious bag to herself, and she looked as if she were dreaming a happy dream and hated to wake. Suddenly her irresistible laugh broke the silence.

"Oh," she cried, flashing a glance from her mother to David, and then to Donald, Rob and Carol, "that was my helpful day, and I put it in that nice old gentleman's suit-case myself."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRINCESS MEETS AN ELF

"CAROL put the finishing touch to the whole thing," said Jane, regarding the blue and silver circle on her little finger with an air of profound satisfaction. "I didn't expect to see that ring again any more than I expected ever to see the heirloom—or my pretty concert girl—or the nice old gentleman—or the girl's brother." It was two days after Christmas, and Jane, making an afternoon call on Mary Brown, had been telling her about everything that had happened since they last met. "Carol made up her mind right away that if her mother would let her, she'd buy it again and give it to me for Christmas. Wasn't it dear of her?"

"Lovely. And the ring looks just right on your hand. I wish I'd given you something really nice, Jane." There was a wistful note in Mary's voice which made Jane smile at her reassuringly.

"Why, I love the pen-wiper you made yourself. And I've been so neat about my pen ever since

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Christmas. I'm not sure that it won't make my writing better to get into such good habits."

Mary laughed, and Jane, listening, felt a thrill of triumph. It was a real laugh, she told herself, and the girl's dark eyes were no longer sorrowful, and her cheeks had a tinge of color.

"Brownie and I didn't do much for Christmas," Mary went on. "She presented me with a wonderful pair of bed shoes that she had made when the kitten would let her have her wool, and I—well, I gave her a small present."

The mention of the kitten made Jane chuckle. Whenever she thought of Miss Brown it was always to see her tangled or caught in some way.

"We didn't do much of anything this year," she said a moment later with a sober look stealing into her eyes. "It's—it's rather expensive for mother to bring up four children, so Davy and I just pretended we didn't want to give any presents except some little things we could make. And, of course, every one was ten times too generous to us." Jane's tone revealed even more than her words. Now that she had started, there was a certain comfort in letting out some of her inmost feelings to this girl, who probably knew as much as she herself did about the trials of not being able to give to one's friends. "Donald gave Spinksy

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and me snowshoes and moccasins," she went on, "and my present to him was some pieces of blotting-paper tied together, with a bee-yu-tiful hand-painted flower on the outside." The sarcastic tone with which she ended made the other girl wince, and look at her perplexedly.

"Probably he liked it just as much as you like the pen-wiper I gave you. You said you loved that," she ventured.

Jane thought hard for an instant. "I do. I really do, though you look as if you don't believe me," she said earnestly. "And it was almost the same, wasn't it? Don knew I couldn't afford to give much, and, of course, I knew—I mean I thought it was lovely of you to remember me at all."

To Jane's surprise Mary actually looked relieved, almost as if she had been dreading something that had not happened, and there was a real light in her eyes and another little laugh. Jane fairly hugged herself. Two laughs in one call. That was progress, and something to tell Dr. Reed.

"I'm just longing to have you know Hilda Prescott and her brother," she said with a quick change of subject. "Carol and I were there yesterday and Hilda said she'd love to have you come in for a cup of chocolate some afternoon." Jane was always setting little enticing traps for this friend,

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but to her disappointment Mary never seemed to get caught.

"Their sitting-room with the open fire, and Grandfather Prescott in the armchair with books all around him, and Hilda dancing in and out with the tea-things, makes just the loveliest picture," Jane went on dreamily. "I've always wished I could adopt a grandmother or a grandfather. They're so—so picturesque."

"How would you feel if you didn't have a single relative?" demanded the other girl with a queer, twisted smile that was worse, Jane thought, than no smile at all.

"I just can't imagine living without my family," she answered slowly. "Oh, Mary, I'm so sorry. Why don't you come sometimes and borrow my mother? Every one else does."

"Perhaps I shall—some day."

Jane always felt as though Mary were hastily withdrawing into herself whenever making new acquaintances was suggested, but she didn't in the least stop planning on that account.

"Of course you have Miss Brown, and she's just as—as picturesque as any grandmother I could imagine," she went on with a twinkle in her eye.

"Did I ever tell you how I first saw Brownie?" Mary was staring thoughtfully out of the window as she asked the question, and Jane felt a sudden

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thrill. It was the first time Mary had volunteered any confidence, and now, perhaps, she should get her reward for the questions she had kept back.

"I was lying in bed in a hospital," Mary began with her eyes fixed on something in the far distance, "and I didn't want to see any one, and I hoped I shouldn't get well. And then one morning the biggest bunch of white and purple lilacs I ever saw walked straight into the room, and behind it was Miss Brown." Mary smiled a little over the picture she was recalling, and Jane waited in breathless silence.

"She began right away to tell me some absurd thing that had just happened to her," continued Mary, "and she gurgled and choked so over it that I couldn't even guess what it was, but I couldn't help laughing a little. And that was the beginning of getting better. After that I saw her every day, because she had a little house, and a lovely garden near by, and she was always running in with flowers, or something she had cooked. Everybody in the hospital loved her, and called her 'dear Miss Brown,'" Mary ended, "and it didn't make any difference to her how poor or homely or disagreeable any one was."

"She's a darling," Jane agreed, hoping that Mary would go on, but not daring to ask a question.

"You don't care whether a person is pretty or

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homely, or rich or poor, do you?" The other girl had turned away from the window and was gazing straight into Jane's eyes with an eagerness which seemed out of proportion to her question. "I mean it wouldn't keep you from liking any one if she were poor and—and not good-looking."

"Not a bit," answered Jane serenely. "I love to see pretty people, and only this morning I was wishing hard that I could be a little richer, but those things don't count when I'm choosing my friends. I suppose—the ones I like best"—Jane was working out the problem in her mind as she talked—"have something in their minds—that answers to something—in me. There, if you can make anything out of that you're a wonder."

"I think perhaps I understand." Mary's face had grown suddenly very cheerful. "But what would you do if you were rich? Don't you ever plan about it?"

"Of course. Every one does, I guess. There are heaps of things I'd like to buy for myself," Jane began with her usual honesty. "But I do hope that first I should see that mother had every cent she wanted. And I'd give Susan Trot money enough so that she could go to school, and then study to be a nurse. I know she could have a better teacher than I am, though she stops her ears when I say so."

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"And I wish," Jane went on, by this time quite interested in her own imaginings, "that I had a little of my wealth in my pocket just now so that I could make a better time for those children the Ninepins are going to have out here next week."

Mary looked at her expectantly. She was interested in the doings of the club. "Tell me about it," she urged.

"Well, you see the club treasury is rather low because the girls didn't get together very early this year, and they haven't had any entertainments or sales. But, of course, the kiddies will have an awfully good time. We've planned for luncheon in the club-house, and if the weather is good they're to coast and build snow-forts and have a real out-of-doors time.

"We're going to manage to give each one of them new leggings and mittens," she went on quickly, "but I'm just wild to send them home with something—why, something just for fun, you know, and that will make them always remember."

"Oh, excuse me," said Mary, rising hastily, and looking as though she hadn't really heard Jane's lengthy explanation. "Brownie's just going to the store, and I forgot to ask her to get me something."

Left to herself Jane pondered over the half

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revelations of the afternoon, and decided that she didn't really know anything more about Mary than she had before. She had almost given up trying to solve the perplexing problems which this friendship brought with it, but this latest conversation made her wonder again why these two should live together, and why Mary should so shrink from knowing other people. "She's poor," Jane said to herself, "and I somehow believe she imagines she's dreadfully homely and disagreeable which, of course, she isn't. I wish—I do wish ——"

"I heard Brownie saying last things to Fanny and I was afraid I should lose her if I didn't hurry," apologized Mary, coming back into the room so suddenly that her guest jumped and felt that she must look guilty. "What were you thinking about? You look miles away."

"About you." Jane laughed and felt a sudden audacity rise within her. "I'm just wishing—oh, Mary, I'm wishing it so hard—that you would come over to the Ninepin party next week and help us out with those children. Somehow I feel it in my bones that you would know how to get on with them."

"Oh, I couldn't. I couldn't possibly. I never had anything to do with children." Mary Brown was shrinking away from her in so evident a panic that Jane realized she had said the wrong thing,

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and that it wasn't the slightest use to urge this girl to meet the other girls and boys.

"Well, never mind. Only I wish you would come with me some time. They'd all like you and be so nice to you, and I'm sure you'd like them. And you're quite well enough now to go out as much as you want to, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. But don't ask me now. Some time—perhaps——" Mary Brown ended vaguely. And then with a sudden wistful eagerness that touched Jane's heart, "Please don't think I want to be so—so obstinate. I just love you for coming to see me, and I shall never forget it."

"Neither shall I, and I'm coming lots of times more, and then I'm going to return all my own calls. Mary, your hair looks perfectly lovely to-day; all soft and cloudy about your face. Well, I must run along. I've spent almost the whole afternoon here."

Going home Jane crunched over the hard snow joyously, and the breeze came to meet her with a swift keen touch that brought roses into her cheeks. At the end of the long street a fiery sun had just dropped out of sight, and the distant pines, rising from fields of snow, were darkly outlined against a crimson sky. She drew a quick breath and gazed and gazed. A sight like this gave her an unexplainable happiness.

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"I hope Spinksy and Don and I can try our snowshoes again soon," she was thinking as she hurried along. "I've got to practice so that I shan't have to be pulled out of the snow every five minutes." She giggled involuntarily at the recollection of the absurd way her feet had acted the first time she put on snowshoes, and of the joy of the others over her valiant attempts to walk straight off the way Serena did. "I've got to learn this vacation," she assured herself decidedly. "Rob says the right sort of snow doesn't come any too often."

"Hello, Janesy, Mr. Chope's been looking for you," Kenneth called, as she started up the front walk, and, turning toward the barn, she saw the old man standing in the doorway and waving something at her.

"For me?" she asked when she got a little nearer. "A letter?"

"Looks like it. I ain't investigated yit, but if you hadn't come jest when you did I dunno as my character would have stood the strain."

"Where did it come from? How did you get it?" Jane was tearing open the envelope with eager fingers, and she almost dropped it when a crackling ten-dollar bill met her eye.

"Jee-rusalem! That's a refreshin' sight, ain't it!" exclaimed Mr. Chope, looking so genuinely

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surprised that no one could have suspected him of knowing what the envelope contained.

"Of all things! It can't be for me." Jane, completely mystified, was staring at her own name, typewritten on the envelope.

"That's the way you spell your name, ain't it? And 'twas left in this barn. P'raps that smart old hoss of ourn has been orrycullin' agin. Or p'raps ——" the light of fancy was playing in the old man's eyes, but it died away again. "I reelly don't know for sure how that thing come here," he went on soberly, "and if I hev my suspicionings, caused by seein' somebody fly 'round a corner," his face assumed a dreamy, almost tender expression, "I ain't goin' to tell unless that somebody says I can."

"Oh, Mr. Chope, I should think you might. Couldn't you tell mother, then, so she'll know whether it's all right to use it?"

Mr. Chope hesitated. "No, I couldn't," he said at last firmly. "You can give your ma my word that it's all right enough for you to use it, but 'tain't fair, is it, for me to give away a secret jest becuz I happen to fall into it?"

"I s'pose not," Jane answered doubtfully. "It can't be a Christmas present for me. Well, anyway, I'll take it to mother and she'll tell me what to do."

On the way to the house she had, in imagina-

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tion, already spent it in six different ways when an illuminating idea struck her. This was exactly what she had been wanting for the club's holiday party. Now each child could have something to take home as a souvenir. By the time Jane reached her mother's room she had a rapidly-growing plan for a wonderful Christmas tree, which should be more beautiful than anything the children had ever seen before.

She found mother reading to Judy, who had been kept in the house by a cold.

"I don't know about having you use money left in that way," said Mrs. Stuart after she had heard about it. "I suppose if Mr. Chope says it's all right it is, but——"

"Look!" croaked Judy, who had been poking her fingers into the envelope Jane had dropped beside her. She pulled out a sheet of thin paper, rather tight for the envelope, on which was typewritten, "For the Ninepin Party."

"Suppose," said Jane, sinking weakly into a chair, "just suppose that hadn't been found, and I had been piggy enough to use the money for myself. Anyway, I'm glad I thought of it before I was reminded. I'm wild to tell the girls, and I must find Spinksy and Don right away and see if they have any idea about it."

As Mr. Chope said, it was "made-a-puppus"

Jane Stuart's Chum

weather when eight members of Miss Rachel Hooper's club came out from the city in charge of an older girl. The boys met them at the station with a big sleigh, and when the sleigh had penetrated into the woods as far as it could go, they packed the children on sleds, and drew them the rest of the way. The change from sleigh to sleds was made in front of the bayberry-candle house, and Rob, glancing at one of the windows, saw a girl holding back the curtain a little and looking out shyly. He hoped he should remember to tell Jane that he had caught a glimpse of the "E. P."

A half hour later Mary Brown, not knowing in the least that she was an enchanted princess, came out of the house intending to wander into the neighborhood of the gay party, but to keep carefully out of sight. In her heart was the faint stirring of a wish to be with others of her own age. "If they were only all like Jane," she said to herself with a little sigh. "I think we two are really friends."

There had been a light fall of snow the night before; enough to freshen the fields and woods into dazzling whiteness again. Mary laughed aloud as a sudden breeze sent a cloud of snow dust into her face, and with the laugh came to her the revelation that she was a different girl from the one who had come to Belhaven a few months ago.

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"I feel strong; I like to walk through the snow and feel the wind pushing me back," she exulted. "I almost wish I had told Jane I would go and—and meet them all."

And then, with this courageous thought hardly out of her mind, she almost turned and fled because she suddenly realized that some one was coming along a path near her. In a minute she saw that it was a red-coated child wearing a diminutive bonnet of black velvet and rosebuds pulled very much to one side. Her shiny rubber boots were suggestive of Christmas, and a last touch of elegance was added to her costume by a small blue parasol which she carried lovingly.

"I want to go to the party. Will you take me?" the newcomer said, slipping her red-mitten hand confidingly into Mary's unwilling one. "Take hold like that," she demanded at once, adjusting the grasp of her newly-found guide to suit her own ideas.

Mary looked at her in amazement, but didn't drop the little hand as she might have expected herself to do.

"Where did you come from? Why aren't you with the others? Did they lose you?" she asked, walking on mechanically in the direction of the club-house, and wondering what she should do with this forceful young person.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"No, they didn't lose me. I lost myself. I guess they just forgot about me. But they'd be very sorry if I wasn't at the party." She hesitated a moment, and then went on glibly, "My name is Pansy O'Brien, and I'm five years old, and I don't like to go to school, and I've got two sisters and three brothers. Now you won't need to ask me any questions, will you? Please, let's talk about the party."

Mary gazed at the cherubic face with its blue eyes and halo of golden hair, and frowned in perplexity. It would spoil the party, she realized, when they found this child had slipped away. If she could only get hold of Miss Brown, or—or some one.

"Would you mind coming back to my house, and then I'll send some one to the party with you?" she asked, somewhat disconcerted by the calmly superior gaze with which Miss Pansy O'Brien was regarding her.

"I couldn't do it. I shall run away and lost myself again if you try to make me. You'd be sorry, wouldn't you, to find me all lied down in the snow? And the kind little birdies would have to cover me up with leaves." The child's voice held a mournful cadence, and she looked as though she were ready to burst into tears.

Suddenly she smiled with overpowering sweet-

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ness, and tugged at Mary's hand. "You take me to the party," she urged in honeyed accents. "I like you 'cause you're so pretty. If you had on a blue dress 'stead of that black one you'd look like the princess in my sister's fairy-book."

"You're a flatterer, and you don't know what you're talking about," answered Mary crossly, and then, at the look of bewilderment in the little face, at once so wise and babyish, she relented.

"If you'll be very, very quiet I'll take you where you can see the party, and then you can go alone," she said, starting at once in the proper direction. The child trotted along at her side, looking curiously into the unsmiling face, but saying nothing.

"There, now, look between the trees; do you see that little house and all the people near it?" said Mary almost in a whisper.

"Yes, but it's awful far. 'Bout ten miles, I should think," answered Pansy O'Brien in a small voice. "I'm—I'm afraid to go alone."

"I'll go a little nearer with you, then, and next time we stop, you mustn't say a word against going on alone. Will you promise?"

"Not a single word," agreed the small girl.

The two stole on for a short distance in perfect silence, Mary trying to keep behind the trees as much as possible, and looking ahead anxiously. By

Jane Stuart's Chum

this time they were pretty near, and she could pick out Jane, and the tall, dark boy, Jane's cousin, from the busy group. Children were running about, but, so far as Mary could tell, no one seemed to be worrying about any lost member of the party.

"Now we're very near," she said in a low tone, trying to make it impressive and sounding very stern in the attempt. "You go on—slowly—and don't say anything about me."

The child looked at her queerly and didn't move. Suddenly she took a fresh grip of Mary's hand, and tugged with such unexpected strength that the older girl found herself drawn out into a small open space, clearly in sight from the little house. At the same instant Pansy flung sturdy arms around her waist and emitted the first of a series of ear-piercing screams which, Mary felt, might easily be heard at the ends of the earth.

"Sh! Oh, stop. Let go of me," she implored, but it was too late. The child's arms only clung the more convulsively, and she could see that people were beginning to run in their direction.

For an instant, blinded somewhat by the dazzling snow, and even more by tears of rage and real humiliation, Mary could scarcely see. Then she lifted her head proudly, and winked the tears away, for close at hand was Jane's cousin, and behind him came Jane herself.

CHAPTER XV

CAROL SEES A LIGHT

"HELLO! What's the matter? Is the little girl hurt?" called Donald, but before any one could answer Jane shot by her cousin like a flash.

"Why, Mary, you did come after all, didn't you? I'm so glad. And who's your friend, and why does she scream?"

"I don't know," answered Mary helplessly, trying to move the little clinging creature so that she could look into her face. "She told me she was lost, and that she wanted to come to the party, so I supposed she belonged."

"But I never said a word after I promised not to, did I?" observed Pansy O'Brien, lifting her face, very red, but absolutely tearless, from Mary's coat. Then, smiling blandly upon them all, she added, "I only screamed and screamed."

"I should think you did," said Jane. "But, Mary, I don't know where she belongs. All of our children are here."

Several of the other girls and boys had come up by this time, and the city children stood around and gazed admiringly at the newcomer. Feeling

Jane Stuart's Chum

herself the center of attraction she obligingly hoisted the small blue parasol again, and looked coyly at them from beneath it.

"I know who you are," said Polly Reed, who was one of the last to join the little group. "You're one of the O'Brien children, aren't you, and you live over on the Cooper Road. How did you know about this party?"

"Heard some girls talking 'bout it. If you please I'd like to see it." Pansy's sweetness of tone and expression were irresistible.

"So you shall," answered Jane warmly. "Girls, and—and everybody, this is my friend, Mary Brown. I'm not going to take time to introduce each one separately, but you can all play you've met before. And now come on back to the party."

"I want to walk with my girl," said Pansy, seizing Mary's hand again.

"You may have one side and I'll have the other," agreed Jane gayly, though she was quaking for fear Mary would refuse.

"Come on, come on, the sun is in the sky, the little birds do fly," sang the unabashed Pansy, in a sort of joyous chant. She was tugging at her new friend's hand, and gazing into the perplexed face with her most enticing expression.

"Come on, come on, the snow is white, to stay away is not polite," warbled Jane, in quick imita-

Carol Sees a Light

tion, tucking her hand under Mary's arm and gently propelling her in the right direction.

Suddenly the girl yielded to the friendly arm, and the small, tugging hand. "I'll come—for a little while," she said slowly, and Jane, giving her no time to repent, almost ran toward the little house, where Mrs. Stuart, Hilda Prescott and Serena were busily getting a substantial luncheon on the long table.

From that moment, as Jane said afterward, everything went on as though the party had been planned for the special purpose of bringing Mary Brown into the companionship she so much needed. She could not feel that these girls and boys were strangers, because she had known them so long through Jane's description, and to her great joy they seemed to take her sudden arrival as a matter of course.

For a while she helped make sandwiches, and in the process quite lost her heart to Mrs. Stuart and Hilda Prescott. Then Jane pulled her into one of the smaller rooms to assist in trimming the little tree which the children were to have after dinner; and a little later, Donald, finding her unoccupied for a moment, begged her to come out and help entertain some of the guests of the club.

It was a new world to Mary. A world full of friendliness and sunshine and self-forgetfulness.

Jane Stuart's Chum

Up to this moment she would have said that she didn't care for children, but now Pansy O'Brien's openly avowed preference for "my girl" filled her with secret pride, and made it possible for her to approach the other children with an air of comradeship. So engrossed was she in trying to do everything asked of her that it didn't occur to her until afterward that Jane's particular friend, Carol, had very skilfully managed to avoid speaking to her.

"Say, talk about the 'E. P.,'" Rob said softly, coming upon Jane during an unoccupied moment. "That 'spell' has had to take an awful whack this time. I don't see why you ever called that girl sad and shy."

"Rob, I'm perfectly thunderstruck." Jane was gazing in wide-eyed amazement at her friend, who at this moment was helping two or three children to roll a huge snowball, and laughing as gleefully as they. "I can hardly believe my eyes. She's almost pretty now, isn't she?"

"Well," answered Rob doubtfully, regarding the hitherto enchanted princess with a critical eye, "well, she looks all right enough. And she acts as if—as if she had never found out before how to have a good time. I'll take my hat off to you, Lady Jane, for being the champion spell-breaker."

"It was really Miss Pansy O'Brien," said Jane

Carol Sees a Light

with a pleased laugh. Then her face grew suddenly sober. "There's only one thing to spoil my happiness to-day," she added.

"Tell me what it is. I'll change it to suit you," Rob promised with a rashness that made Jane smile again.

"You can't. It's about Molly. She's here because she's the Ninepin president, and because she got this up, but she isn't having a bit of a good time. And it's all because that obstinate Stanley won't come where Mr. Prescott is."

"Freak! What on earth does he expect us to do? Boycott the Prescotts on his account?" began Rob angrily, and then the sight of Mrs. Stuart beckoning to them from the door of the little house made them both stop talking, and run to see what she wanted.

The out-of-doors good time ended with the call to lunch, and afterward the children sat around the open fire in the girls' club-room, and had a dessert of popcorn and apples while Frederick Prescott told stories, and drew pictures on a black-board to illustrate them. Even the older people were absorbed in the tale of the ambitious little fir-tree which yearned to be taken away from its peaceful home in the forest.

Jane watched with longing eyes the way the clever fingers brought out the different scenes on

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the blackboard, and hugged herself over the remembrance that Mr. Prescott had said her drawings were quite worth while, and that she was to have lessons from him after this vacation was over.

A little later they all trooped back into the big room again, where lunch had been cleared away, and where a glittering Christmas tree, the very image of the one they had just been hearing about, held out its frosted, sparkling branches in fragrant welcome.

Mr. Chope, who had volunteered to go and relieve any anxiety Mrs. O'Brien and Miss Brown might feel, had brought the latter back with him, and was secretly admiring the gleeful abandon with which she shared the joy of the children.

Such treasures as that tree disclosed. First, school-bags made of brown twine which could be slung proudly over one shoulder, and used as a carry-all for other gifts. Oranges, nuts and candy, of course; no self-respecting Christmas tree could hold up its head without those. Then dolls for the girls, and musical tops for the boys; paint-boxes for the girls and magnetic toys for the boys. Wonderful hit-or-miss boxes, as Mrs. Stuart called them, in which had been carefully packed a choice collection of five and ten cent articles.

"It's wonderful, isn't it, how much fun you can get out of a ten-dollar bill—just dropped from the



“IT WAS YOU, WASN'T IT?” SHE SAID

Carol Sees a Light

sky," said Jane, getting up from the floor where she had been helping some of the boys to spin their tops.

"Haven't you found out yet where that came from?" asked Carol curiously.

Jane had "no" on the end of her tongue, but a sudden glance at little Miss Brown, who had evidently heard Carol's question, made her hesitate and look more closely. The little lady's pink cheeks were growing redder, and she looked at the floor, and half turned away as though hoping to escape Jane's penetrating gaze. Guilt was written on her face, and Jane felt all the pride of a discoverer.

"It was you, wasn't it?" she said rapidly, seizing Miss Brown by her two hands. "You left that ten-dollar bill in the barn, didn't you?"

The little old lady looked at her appealingly. "Oh, my dear, you—you ought not to ask me," she faltered. "I—I didn't mean ——"

"Never mind. It's lovely to know. Girls, girls, this is the fairy godmother. You know what I mean. The giver of a certain pretty, crackling piece of paper with a large X on it. Come on; dance around her and salute." Jane clutched the hands of the persons standing nearest her and swung them in a wild whirl about Miss Brown. The others joined in the widening circle, and each

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girl passing in front of the little lady bowed low. Mary Brown, dancing with the rest, her face full of mischievous delight, made even more of a salute than the others.

"But—but," stammered Miss Brown, as soon as the laughter and noise had subsided a little, "it was Mary ——"

"Oh, I know it was Mary who asked you," said Jane, not realizing that the sentence was unfinished. "Put Mary in the middle, too, girls, and give her a salute all for herself. She just slid quietly out of the room when I said we wanted money, and never hinted what she was going for."

"I want to stand with my girl in the middle of everything," said Pansy O'Brien, deserting a small boy to whom she had taken a violent fancy, and nearly throwing Mary off her feet by her sudden onslaught. "My girl is a princess, a princess, a princess," she sang in a little high voice; "I will give her a dress, a blue dress, and a shiny crown."

Mary in her plain-looking black dress shrank from the child's encircling arms, and a slow, dull color came in her cheeks.

"Once more around for Mary," cried Molly, seeing her embarrassment and meaning to make things easier.

"Don't expect me to whirl any more," protested Carol, twitching away from the circle and walking

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off with a pretense of weariness. It was foolish, she knew, but somehow it gave her a little pang to see how quickly the line closed up, and how little they needed her as they swept once more about the rosy old lady and the slender girl.

Later on when the winter sunshine was beginning to grow pale the children were packed on the sleds again, and whisked out to the waiting sleigh, and so to the train.

The boys came back to find the little club-house in its normal condition, and the girls just getting ready to go home. Suddenly from their midst came the wail of the weary Miss Pansy O'Brien.

"I want to go home," she sobbed; "you got me over here, and—and you got me all—tired—out."

Mrs. Stuart and Frederick Prescott started toward her at the same moment, and she cast herself tumultuously upon the latter. "I'll let you take me home," she wailed, "and my girl must go too."

"Ach, Kindchen, perhaps your girl is tired also. Get your little coat and that wonderful bonnet and ——"

"And my sunshade."

"Surely—the sunshade, and I will myself take you home on a sled." The young man stood for an instant with the flushed, weary little creature in his arms. Suddenly her head went down on

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the broad shoulder "I want my—girl—to go," she said in a stifled voice.

Mary, forgetting her shyness, came from out the group of girls, and patted the small hand which the child was stretching out vaguely in search of her. She felt a sudden glow of pleasure at being so wanted. "I'll come with you, honey," she said softly.

"Let's all walk around that way," proposed David. "It isn't much farther."

"I'm not going," Carol said abruptly.

"Oh, come on," urged Jane. "It isn't really late, and you can come into our house afterward and talk it all over."

"No, I don't want to." Carol shook her head stubbornly, and hurried into her coat. "No one need mind about me. Good-bye, all," and without another word she had slipped out of the door and was off along the homeward path.

"I'll go with her," David said quietly to his mother, and went in swift pursuit.

An hour later David and Donald, coming home from the post-office, found Jane in a big armchair before the library fire.

"I'm just too tired to move, but I'm awfully happy," she remarked lazily. "Didn't those kiddies have the time of their lives? And then to think that cherub of a Pansy should drag Mary in

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by main force! I was too surprised, and too anxious to make her stay to see the joke of it just at first, but it was lovely, wasn't it? Did you take Carol home, Spinksy?"

"Yes. That is, I went with her until we were in sight of the house. She wanted to shake me before that, but of course I couldn't let her."

"Is she—is she very grouchy?"

"Jane, you're too popular," said Donald suddenly, "or else Carol's a little goose. I'm not sure which."

"I'm not too popular." Jane was aroused at once. "I'm fond of all the girls, and they like me, and except Carol, they don't care a snap if I like forty others. I don't see why Carol should think I've got to like just one, and she'd be the one."

"She didn't say anything like that when we were going home," said David. "I got in wrong by asking her if she'd spoken to the new girl, and then—well, I tried to make her brace up and be a good sport, but somehow it didn't work. She's got it in for me, all right."

"Poor Spinksy." Jane was regarding her twin with a mischievous glance. "One girl's enough for you to manage, and I'm the one."

Donald, who had been promenading back and forth, looking very thoughtful, suddenly stopped and came to sit down near the other two.

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"By Jinks!" he said explosively, with such a change from his usual quiet manner that the twins looked at him in surprise. "I bet I realize more than any of the rest of you how Mary Brown was feeling to-day. I guess I know how it seems to be hungry and thirsty for something you never think you're going to have, and then—all of a sudden—get it."

"Well, I only hope Mary won't go back into her shell," murmured Jane.

"Keep at her. Don't let her," Donald urged. "I'm almost equal to going over there, and informing her myself how good it will be for her to have a jolly time with girls and boys. I tell you I'm walking on air most of the time." He sprang from his chair and pranced up and down the room again with so ridiculously happy an expression that Jane and David had to laugh at him.

A sudden peal of the door-bell made Donald, who was nearest, hurry to the front door, and the twins could hear him urging some one to come in. A moment later he reappeared followed by Stanley Oliver.

"Hello, Stan, where have you been all vacation? I've hardly seen you." David pulled up a chair for the unexpected guest, and tried hard to make his welcome sound cordial.

"Oh, nowhere in particular—just around town,"

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Stanley answered vaguely. In the face of friendliness like this it was hard for him to keep up the resentful pose he had adopted. Jane, looking at him as he stood in the full glow of the fire, told herself decidedly that it was a pity such a nice looking boy should be such a grumpy goose.

"I wish you'd been there this afternoon, Stanley," she said suddenly. "We needed every bit of help we could have. And, did Molly tell you, my friend, Mary Brown, came to the party?" Jane's air of triumph was perfectly evident.

"I haven't seen Molly, but Carol told me. I met her just at her gate and went in for a little while. She said she thought you liked very queer people." Stanley laughed, and Jane felt immediately that Carol had probably said a great deal more than this.

"I don't see anything specially queer about Mary. I think it's a great deal queerer not to be willing to be nice to her," she sputtered, with her cheeks growing very hot and red. "Why under the sun people want to be so grouchy, and not like people who haven't done a thing to them, and—and try to make them uncomfortable——" she stopped suddenly, warned by Stanley's expression that he was taking these remarks to himself.

"Oh, I didn't mean you this time," she tried to explain, thereby only making matters worse.

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Then, realizing that nothing she could say would help her out, she recklessly plunged in still deeper.

"I don't care, I think it's very mean of you to go with those other boys all the time and make Molly so unhappy. And Mr. Prescott and his sister want to be friends with you, and you won't let them. You're just foolishly ——" Jane suddenly realized that David and Donald were staring at her uncomfortably, and she stopped talking and picked up the poker and broke a lump of coal with a spiteful blow.

"Perhaps you think I like having a teacher down on me," said Stanley huffily. He was staring at the fire, which had leaped into brilliant flame under Jane's sudden attack, and his boyish face looked as though he thought himself very much ill-used. "I haven't had a decent mark in his classes since he's been here."

"Well, I don't see that that's his fault," began Jane, but a warning pinch from her twin who had sat down on the arm of her chair silenced her.

"And you don't any of you really want me," Stanley went on, so absorbed in his own trials that he scarcely noticed Jane's interruption. "You just put up with me because I'm Molly's brother. You needn't think I'm such a numskull as not to see that."

"For pity's sake why don't you make us like

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you for just yourself, then?" demanded Jane, totally disregarding her own conscience and David's forceful grip on her arm. "We're all ready, but if you will keep on being hateful to Molly, and doing all sorts of babyish, spiteful tricks to make Mr. Prescott uncomfortable you can't expect——"

Her impatient voice stopped suddenly at sight of her mother coming into the room with hand outstretched and the smile of welcome she always had for Stanley.

"You're just in time for supper, Stanley," Mrs. Stuart said cordially. "Boys, are you both ready? We shall be called in fifteen minutes."

"Thank you, I can't stay," mumbled Stanley, almost without looking at her. "I—I only came because Carol asked me to bring a note to Jane. Good-bye, all," and extracting from his pocket a missive addressed in Carol's dashing handwriting, he went before any one could say a word.

"Oh, say, you made me feel like a perfect 'it,' Mrs. Janes," groaned David. "By the time I could think of anything half-way decent to say to Stan you'd jump in and rub it into him again. I'm too everlastingly slow."

His twin looked at him with an expression of mingled rebellion and penitence. "Spinksy, I'm just as old as you are, and if I think it is proper

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to—to reprove any one, you ought not to stop me.”

“Reprove!” repeated Donald, opening his eyes very wide. “My conscience! What would it be if you really scolded?”

Jane giggled naughtily, but grew sober again under mother's clear gaze. “Mumsey, don't you think I might have a nice little home-made muzzle, that I could carry up my sleeve and slip on when Stanley comes in sight?”

The boys laughed, as she had expected, but mother's brown eyes were looking out of the window at something so far away that for the moment she seemed aloof from them all.

“Oh, mumsey, come back,” Jane said with a little shiver, jumping up to put her arm around her mother. “Ple-ase, don't go a million miles away like that all in a second. It makes your little twins feel lonesome, doesn't it, Spinksy?”

Mother's gaze traveled back into the room then, and there was a smile in her eyes for all of them. “I think you might have a Jane-made muzzle, dear,” she said simply. “I'm inclined to believe it doesn't do a bit of good to scold Stanley. I fancy his father makes that mistake. And poor Molly is young, and tries so hard, and—and just now they're all rubbing each other the wrong way.”

Carol Sees a Light

"I'm sorry," Jane answered, this time in all seriousness. "I thought Stan looked awfully sober when he came in. It made me cross, though, to think that he and Carol had been talking about Mary Brown. Oh, I haven't read Carol's note."

Jane pulled the note from its envelope with a little sense of relief. Just at that moment she was glad to get away from the subject of Stanley. Then, as the meaning of the letter written in Carol's most illegible writing penetrated her mind, the color flew into her cheeks.

"For goodness' sake, listen to this," she said hastily, and read aloud:

"DEAR LADY JANE:

"I'm a reformed character, and Stanley did it. He's been so hateful about Mr. Prescott this afternoon that it made me see how I must seem about Mary Brown. Now this doesn't mean that I promise to try to like her, but I won't be horrid to her—nor about her. I'll just keep out of her way as much as I can, that's all.

"Please tell the honorable Mr. Spinksy that I'm sorry I was grouchy.

"Janey, I love you. You're my chum, even if I'm not yours.

"Devotedly,

"CAROL.

"P. S. I gave Stan such a going-over for the way he treats Molly and Mr. Prescott. I guess he was glad to get out of the house. C."

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Poor old Stan," commiserated David. "The way you girls get after any one when you don't happen to like what they do is a caution."

"Well, now look here." Jane was moved to immediate defense of herself and her friends. "It isn't just the girls. The boys always act as if they only put up with Stanley because he lives here, and goes to school with them, and he's Molly's brother, and they can't shake him. I—I always feel it in the air," she ended, nodding her head wisely.

"That's so," seconded Donald. "It always seems to me that every one is expecting Stan to be on the grouchy side, and—well, he generally doesn't disappoint them."

"Here are four of us—for a start," said mother as they left the library. "Suppose for a while we all try expecting what we'd like to get from Stanley." Her manner was so much that of one who had thought of it for the first time that Jane looked at her in surprise.

"Why, mother, you always do, and he's awfully nice with you," she said hastily.

"Well," answered mother, and looked at her daughter with the smile that always warmed Jane's heart, "multiply that by four, then, and what's the answer?"

CHAPTER XVI

BROKEN ICE

IN Jane's opinion there were weeks at a time when life seemed to consist almost wholly of getting up and going to bed, with a few hours of school and lessons to break the absolute monotony.

"It's something like a treadmill—isn't that what you call it?—and the few good times stick up their heads like nice old lighthouses," she remarked, on her way to school one morning in February.

"Mixed metaphors," exulted David, before his twin could have time to think better of it. "Lighthouses don't grow on treadmills."

"That's poetic license," Donald remarked. "What's your highest lighthouse since January first, Jane?"

"The Snowshoe Club picnic, of course." Jane knew very well that there couldn't be two opinions about this. "Did you ever taste anything so good as that bacon we cooked out-of-doors, and wasn't it perfectly thrilling to scoot over miles and miles of country that way?"

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"Miles and miles!" David echoed solemnly.
"At least four, there and back."

"Well, that's two miles and two miles," said Jane. "I didn't say how many, did I, Rob?" she added, as that young gentleman, who had been watching for them, fell into step with her.

"Of course you didn't. What was it all about?"

"Treadmills and lighthouses," David answered promptly. "I want you to understand that we converse on very important subjects on our way to school."

"Talking about thrills at the Snowshoe picnic," said Donald with a sly glance at Jane, "Rob hasn't seen my snapshot of David getting over the wire fence. It's a peach, isn't it, Jane?"

"I should say as much. You can't tell the difference between Spinksy and the snowshoes and the fence. But have you seen any of our portrait studies, Rob? Don and I have gone into the photographic business. I help pose the subjects—or objects, which is it?—and he does the rest. He's taken some perfectly fine pictures of Molly and Polly and Carol and Mary. I didn't suppose we could get Mary to sit, but she did."

"What's the latest thing in spell-breaking?" asked Rob, who still persisted in regarding Jane's friendship with Mary Brown in this light.

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"Oh, the spell was in smithereens some time ago; that is with me, I mean. Mary doesn't seem to feel absolutely sure of the other girls yet, though I can't see why, for they're all lovely to her—all except Carol, of course." The shrug with which Jane ended spoke volumes.

"Carol's perfectly polite to her," said David suddenly. "And she was your very first friend here."

"Oh, I know it," agreed Jane wearily. "Let's talk about something else. It makes me cross to think I can't have seventeen chums if I want to. When's the next Glee Club rehearsal, Rob, and how much money do you suppose the concert will give us toward the new piano?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Rob. "Your delightful conversation made me forget what I've been aching to tell you."

"Do hurry up," begged Jane. "Is it a secret? We're almost at the schoolhouse."

"Not a secret, but I wanted to have the fun of telling you three first. I came out from the city late yesterday afternoon on the train with your dear Miss Brown. Of course I walked over home with her—she had about forty-leven packages to carry—and, of course, too, she made me come in and have cookies."

"Was Mary there?" demanded Jane, whose im-

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patient spirit found it hard to stand so leisurely a narrative.

"Yes, and she kept slyly reminding Miss Brown that I was the manager of the Glee Club concert. I didn't have an idea what she was driving at, and I was trying to go home." Rob paused for what seemed to Jane an interminable time, but she was wise enough for once to keep quiet.

"Your 'E. P.' acted like a mischievous kid, and Miss Brown was more and more flustered, but, at last, she managed to get out that Mary had told her that the Glee Club was trying to raise money for a new piano," Rob went on. "And she said we ought to get a good one, and she'd see that we had whatever money was lacking for it. Truly I thought she would burst into tears before she got through, she was so embarrassed."

"Goodness! She must have a lot of money," Jane said with conviction. "You know Mary is tutoring with Hilda Prescott, and now she says that Miss Brown just insists that Hilda shall give Susan Trot lessons, too, and the bill is to be sent to her."

"I can't imagine nice little Miss Brown insisting upon anything," said Rob. "Is Susan pleased?"

"Well, if you knew what a crush she has on Hilda you wouldn't ask that," answered Jane,

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stopping for a moment at the foot of the school steps. "Won't there be skating this afternoon, boys? I'm wild to do something exciting."

"No, marm. The ice isn't safe," Rob said with emphasis. "I couldn't possibly let you go on it to-day, my child. Besides, David and Don and I have other fish to fry, haven't we, boys?"

"Oh, what? Spinksy, you haven't told me that you're all going to do something this afternoon." Jane clutched her twin's arm, but the warning clang of the first gong made them all race up the steps in a hurry.

A little later, Jane, looking across the study-room, rested her gaze on Molly, whom she had not seen for several days, and it occurred to her all at once that Molly had grown thin and had lost her pretty color.

"She ought to come and talk to mother," Jane said to herself, suggesting her universal remedy for all woes. She wondered how it would seem to have a father who didn't pay any attention to one's troubles, and a brother who could be very nice if he tried, but who didn't usually try. Her wandering gaze traveled across the room again and rested on Stanley, and she decided that he didn't look any happier than his sister. "Probably they had some kind of a rumpus before they started for school," she thought, and then endeav-

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ored to fix her mind on lessons instead of on her friends.

For some reason things didn't go smoothly this morning, and, though she didn't put it into words, Jane's conviction that life was a bit monotonous grew stronger. Then, when she got home, it was a distinct grievance to find that mother was out, and that David and Donald were taking a hasty lunch in preparation for going somewhere.

"Why can't you take me, too, boys?" she said pleadingly as she began on her own lunch. "I could be all ready in a minute, and mother always likes to have me with you."

"Why, we can't do anything about it," David answered hastily. "Rob has got to take that old gentleman, who's been visiting them, back home, and he just asked Don and me to go to fill up the sleigh."

"Oh," said Jane, somewhat more satisfied, but still feeling ill-used. "Anyway, I think Rob might take some boys who haven't any sisters. I'm going to be horribly lonesome this afternoon with Carol going away—and Mary busy with Hilda—and Polly having mumps."

"Poor little Jane!" Donald was half teasing, half sympathizing. "We shall be home at least an hour before supper, and then you can help me develop those last pictures we took."

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"Oh, pooh, I'm tired of messing round with plates and films," his cousin responded ungratefully. And then there was the jingle of approaching sleigh-bells, a shrill whistle from Rob, and after a few minutes, Jane, watching from the dining-room window, saw them drive away.

"Heigh-ho," she yawned. "I'm too sleepy to study or read. I ought to go out somewhere. I'll take a walk, and see what Serena is doing."

She heard the familiar "honk" of the Heath automobile as she stepped into the hall, and she opened the door to meet Carol, who had come in breathless haste to say good-bye.

"I shan't be back until Saturday night, Lady Jane, so please miss me dreadfully," she said pleadingly. "I'll see you in school Monday morning, and do, do save the afternoon for me. I shall be heart-broken if you don't."

"I'm sorry—but I can't," faltered Jane. "I've promised Mary ——"

"Fiddle!" Carol interrupted. "You're always promising that girl something, and I hardly ever get you to myself. Put her off, Janey, and play with me instead. Oh, do, just this once."

"I can't," Jane persisted, hating to seem obstinate, but not knowing any other way out of it.

"Oh, all right," Carol flashed back in a tone that meant it was all wrong. She was down the

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steps and in the machine before Jane could realize it, and there was not even the wave of a hand as the automobile rolled away.

Jane, looking rather sober, started to close the door, but opened it again at sight of Molly, coming up the walk with her skates slung over her shoulder.

"Why, Molly, are you going skating? Rob says the ice isn't safe."

"Oh, he's fussy about it. We can keep near the edge until we find out. Stan thinks it's strong enough. Anyway, I'm going." Molly's cheeks were red, and her eyes so bright that Jane wondered how she could have thought that she looked ill.

"Jane, I've got to, because Stan insists upon going," Molly went on, in a queer, excited way, so different from her usual manner that Jane looked at her in amazement. "And I want you to go too, and help me keep him away from those boys—you know the ones I mean."

Jane nodded wisely. It gave her a little feeling of pride to have Molly, so much older than she, and such a leader among the girls, come to her for help.

"You and your mother always understand. I wouldn't tell any one else, but father and Stan had such a talk this morning that it frightened

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me." The color burned more brightly in Molly's cheeks, and her eyes looked unnaturally large. "Father says that if he knows of Stan going with those boys any more he's going to send him away to school. And—and any one would hate to be sent away from home as a punishment," she ended with a little shivering sigh that touched Jane's quick sympathies.

"Of course I'll go with you. We can decide after we get over to the pond whether the ice is safe. But I don't see how I'm going to help out about Stanley," she said with a little frown of perplexity.

"Why, he likes you, and he thinks there's no one equal to your mother, and—well, you know, any one is likely to do more for some one who isn't his sister. You see—if I'm not alone—it won't look so much as if I were tagging," Molly explained haltingly.

"All right, I'll go. And if the ice isn't safe, perhaps I can obligingly sprain my ankle, so he'll have to see that I get home safely. Sit down near the fire, Mollyolly, while I get ready. You keep shivering."

"I know it, but I'm hot enough just now. Hurry, Jane, please." Molly was walking up and down the room with a quite evident nervousness, and Jane scurried off up-stairs, feeling that action was better than words.

Jane Stuart's Chum

She wished that mother were home—or even the boys. The thought of Hilda and Frederick Prescott came into her mind, but, of course, they wouldn't have any influence with Stanley, who still persisted in avoiding them whenever he could. Anyway, she needn't go on the ice unless it was perfectly safe. The weather had been growing steadily colder for the last two days, she was sure. And why should Rob know more about it than Molly and Stan, who had always lived in Belhaven?

As they went by Frederick Prescott's house on the way to the pond, Jane slackened her pace to wave her hand to Mary Brown, who was waiting on the porch for the door to be opened. "Wish you a good lesson," she called clearly, but even when Mary's "Thanks. Where are you going?" came back, Molly did not turn her head, nor lessen her speed. Jane swung her skates in the air in answer to Mary's question, and hurried on after Molly, who seemed so unlike herself that it was almost frightening.

"There's Stan," Molly said anxiously as they reached the pond. "Do you—do you see those other boys, Jane?"

"No. But there are lots of people skating. And the pond looks as hard—as hard as ice," Jane answered with a little laugh. Then, as

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Stanley came nearer, she called, "Hello, Stan. I was hoping you were going to help me put on my skates. Do you think the pond is perfectly safe?"

"Of course. I shouldn't let you and Molly come on it if I didn't. There may be a place or two where it is a little shaky, but you just have to look out for those." Stanley took a sweeping survey of the pond, then bent himself to the task of putting on Jane's skates.

"You see," began Jane confidentially, "you and Molly are used to skating over deep water, but I've done the most of mine in a rink, and I'm rather a scare-cat when you talk about shaky places."

"Don't you worry, I'll take care of you—for a while, anyway." Stanley finished Jane's skates, and took another prolonged look around the pond as he rose to his feet. "If you should go in I'll pick you out all right. I know exactly what to do and how to do it."

Jane's spirit rose in revolt, as it always did against the boastfulness of his tone and manner, but she crushed down everything she wanted to say, and thought hard about her mother.

"Want any help, Molly?" she heard Stanley say to his sister, and then in a lower tone, "What made you come? I thought you were on the sofa with a headache and a cold when I left the house."

"I decided to try the fresh-air cure," Molly an-

Jane Stuart's Chum

swered, in a sort of tired voice, and Jane noticed that the vivid color had left her cheeks now, and she looked pale and listless. "I'm going to leave you in Stan's care, Jane, and I'll go ahead, and see what I think about the ice." And then she was off with slow, sweeping strokes.

Jane watching, while Stanley tightened his skates, noticed that Molly kept well along the edge of the pond, and only made little experimental journeys toward the center. Presently she turned and came back, skating now with more of her accustomed energy.

"So far as I can see it's all right. I don't know why Rob should think it isn't safe," she said perplexedly.

"Oh, Rob's an old granny. We never should do any skating if we took his word for it," her brother scolded.

"Well, anyway, don't go into the center, please, Stan. Now that I've got Jane over here I feel an awful responsibility about her."

"Fiddlesticks! Jane's a good sport. She isn't afraid to go anywhere I'll take her, are you, Jane?"

Jane looked doubtful. "Well, I don't know. You see if mother had been at home to say I might come I should feel better. Of course no one would want to fall into the water without her mother's permission." She was rattling on absurdly, try-

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ing to avoid offending Stanley, and conscious of a quaking fear at the idea of skating where it was in the least doubtful. "Naturally, I shouldn't mind an icy plunge, but I simply couldn't stand it to have Rob say, 'I told you so,' " she went on with a laugh. "And, of course, mother wouldn't want me to take any risk."

"Oh, all right, all right." Stanley's manner was rather ungracious. "We'll go around close to the shore a few times like good little children, and by that time probably you'll have enough of it. Anyway I promised some of the fellows I'd see them here this afternoon," he ended vaguely.

"Well, I call that a cool way of getting rid of me," said Jane, making up a little face. She had seen Molly's look of distress when Stanley mentioned the other boys, and she was cudgeling her brain for some way out of it all. "I suppose, though," she added with a sudden return to meekness, "that I can't complain when I'm poking in, and spoiling your skating. Is the ice really a lot better in the center?"

"Oh, yes, but it isn't bad around the edge, and, of course, I shouldn't want you to do anything that your mother wouldn't like. Come on; we're wasting time," and Stanley, who had been circling around with some impatience, held out his hands to Jane, and swept her into a long, slow glide. As

Jane Stuart's Chum

they rounded the curve of the pond she caught a glimpse of Molly, skimming along not far behind them, her face very white and sober.

Jane tried to talk, but they were skating against the wind, and the sharp air cut her sentences in pieces. In spite of everything she was enjoying the tour around the pond, for Stanley was a splendid skater, and in some way gave her great confidence in her own powers.

"You're—you're the best I ever—skated with," she gasped, as they neared their starting point and slackened pace to wait for Molly. "I never knew before how well you do it." Her enthusiasm was so genuine that Stanley's gloom lightened a little.

"You never gave me a chance to show you. You've always skated with David or the other boys. Come on; I'll teach you a new stroke the next time around."

Molly, being asked to join them, preferred to go her own way. "It's just as well we decided to keep near the edge," she said before they started off again. "One boy broke through a thin place near the center at the other end. If he hadn't been going so fast and thrown himself forward, he would have gone in."

Circling the pond this second time, Jane was so eager over learning the new stroke, and found Stanley so good a teacher, that the moments flew

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and they were back again at the starting point before she realized it.

"Say, but you're quick about getting hold of anything," Stanley said with an eager admiration that pleased her. "I believe we could do that together like a breeze if we practice a little more. How 'bout it? Are you game for another round?"

Jane was beginning to be tired, but she pluckily refused to own it, even to herself. "Come on," she said, "unless Molly wants to skate with you, and leave me to practice alone for a while."

But Molly, coming up just then, was quick to refuse again, and Jane and Stanley started off once more.

This time she was so intent upon deserving Stanley's praise that she grew a little self-conscious, and didn't do as well as she had before. Half-way around she begged to stop for a minute and make a fresh start, and, to her disgust, the little interval of rest gave opportunity for one of the Dallas Street boys, who had apparently just reached the pond, to skate up to them and speak to Stanley.

"I'll be there pretty soon," the latter answered, and Jane, noticing that he frowned, and spoke curtly, came to the sudden conclusion that he didn't want to go, but hated to give in, and would probably be foolishly stubborn about it.

"Dear me! I don't see how mother could have

Jane Stuart's Chum

the courage now to expect from Stan what she'd want to get," she said to herself with a sigh, as they swung around the end of the pond, and turned once more toward the place from which they had started. "I can't beg him to keep on skating with me; and Molly looks like a ghost, and as if she's all ready to cry."

Somehow, for both herself and Stanley, the zest of practicing the little dancing step seemed to be gone, and, what was worse, the more she tried to think of anything effective to say, the harder it became to speak at all. For the next few minutes they glided along in silence, and a feeling of disappointment grew in Jane's heart.

"Hello! There's Mr. Prescott standing on the bank watching everybody. He can't let us alone even when we're out of school, can he?" remarked Stanley, with a return of his old disagreeable manner.

Jane lacked the spirit to retort in her usual way even when so good an opportunity offered, so she kept still, and in another moment they had reached Molly, who had been circling aimlessly for some time.

"Jane's tired, Molly. I can tell by the way she wabbles around. You'd better take her home," Stanley said abruptly. "Please tell your mother that I didn't let you fall into the water, Jane."

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"Why can't you both come home with me, and we'll make fudge? I'm all alone this afternoon, and I want some little playmates dreadfully." Jane gave her invitation in what she felt was a truly tactful and spontaneous manner, and she had a delicious moment of thinking that Stanley was going to consent.

Then he shook his head. "You girls run along together," he said stubbornly. "Perhaps I'll look in later."

"Oh, come on with us, Stan," pleaded Molly. And then, with a sudden whirl, she caught his arm and swung him, apparently by accident, out of Jane's hearing.

Jane gazed around the pond, at Mr. Prescott, still watching the skaters, at the sky; anywhere so that she need not look at Stanley, who was facing in her direction. All at once it occurred to her that she might be taking off her skates, and she began immediately.

"Here, let me do that," said Stanley, suddenly close beside her. "I'll take yours off in a minute, Molly." He glanced up at his sister as he spoke, with a half-ashamed look on his face, but Molly, so pale now that it frightened Jane, stared straight ahead of her without a word. All at once her eyes filled with tears and she rubbed them away fiercely.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"You'll have to wait for me a few minutes. I can't walk home like this," she said in a strained voice, winking away the tears again. Then, before Jane could answer, she wheeled abruptly and started off, apparently not noticing where she was going, and skating strongly as though only air and motion could help her gain her self-control.

Stanley, having finished taking off Jane's skates, bent to tighten his own. Jane would have thought his expression of gloomy determination funny if she hadn't been so sympathetic over his sister's troubles.

She turned away from him to look at Molly, and wondered why she was skating straight toward the center of the pond when she had told them not to. Then it occurred to her that perhaps, because she was crying, she didn't know where she was going. And then, all at once, she saw Molly waver in her course, and throw up her hands and go down, clutching at the air, at the breaking ice—at nothing.

The next few seconds made up a year in the calendar of Jane's mind. She could remember afterward trying to scream, and making only a queer gurgle in her throat; trying to move, and standing stock-still. Instinct told her that Stanley must have started toward that jagged hole in the ice, and yet there he was, close beside her, motion-

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less, a frozen horror in his face. She tried again to scream at him, but no sound came.

Then the year being over, another one began, in which she found voice and motion, and shuffled over the ice in her slippery shoes toward the place where she had last seen Molly. She could hear some one screaming, and after a while she knew that it was her own voice calling Stanley.

At last some one, not on skates, went flying past her, and a little farther on, dropped flat on the ice and shoved himself along cautiously. Then her vision cleared, and reason came back, and she knew that it was Mr. Prescott, and realized what he meant to do, and that he would need help.

She rushed back to Stanley and shook him into life. There were others coming, but he was the nearest. "If you don't help, Molly'll drown," she shrieked, and then almost fell as he started forward with sudden violence.

After that there were plenty to help, and Jane hung around behind the others, and tried not to see, and looked in spite of herself. It seemed ages before she could be sure that Mr. Prescott was safely clutching Molly when strong hands pulled him cautiously away from the gaping hole. Then a huddled group of people, carrying somebody, started toward the cottage at the end of the pond.

"They'll take her into Mrs. Ware's," a chatter-

Jane Stuart's Chum

ing girl, whom Jane had never seen before, said nervously. "Mrs. Ware, she's lived close by this pond for years, and she knows just what to do for drowned people. Probably some one's gone for the doctor already. P'raps it isn't much use ——" and then she stopped, for the white-faced girl beside her had fled without a word.

Straight home Jane ran in sheer, unreasoning terror. No one saw her when she reached the house, and she went into her own room, and threw herself on the couch and put both hands over her ears. "Molly wouldn't have run away," she said with a little sob, and then shut her eyes, and buried her face in the cushions.

She had no idea of time as she lay there, dreading, yet longing, to have some one come, and giong over and over the dreadful thing in her mind.

Suddenly she heard the front door open, and David's voice calling her name; then a quick rush up the stairs.

"Jane—Janey, where 'are you?" and when she answered in a miserable little voice, he was there beside her in a second.

"Are you hurt? Mother's just heard you were with Molly, and she sent me to find you," he said anxiously, giving her a sudden bear-like hug.

"Tell—me about—Molly," Jane half whispered,

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not daring to look at him until she should hear. "Is she—is she dead?"

"She's as—she's as chipper as—as a robin," answered David, trying to be as startlingly cheerful as possible, and succeeding to such good purpose that his twin sat up as if electrified, and then, hiding her head on his shoulder, burst into a storm of grateful tears.

"Rainy weather, isn't it?" murmured David, patting his sister's back sympathetically, and wisely letting her cry it out. "But you needn't be so sorry she's all right, because I exaggerated just a little. It seems she was coming down with grippe or something before she went out this afternoon, and Dr. Reed can't tell yet what this may do for her."

"I'm—I'm not sorry she's all right, Spinksy Stuart," sobbed Jane indignantly. "I'm just as—as happy as I—can be. Where's—where's mother?"

"She's with Molly. And Hilda Prescott's there, too. And—say, Mrs. Janes, my shoulder's getting awfully damp—they're going to have a nurse to-night. Poor old Stan was hustling round, trying to do everything for everybody and looking so meek and frightened that you wouldn't know him."

Jane sat up and wiped her eyes. "I should think he'd better look meek," she said emphat-

Jane Stuart's Chum

ically ; " any one who's boasted —— " and then she stopped talking and shut her mouth firmly. If she didn't tell, no one would know that Stanley had not started to the rescue until she had fairly made him go.

" He's down-stairs in the library," continued David. " Mother sent him over here for something, and he wants to see you before he goes back. I—I think you'd better go kind of easy with him, Mrs. Janes."

" Oh, Spinksy, I don't want to see him just now ; must I ? " Jane clutched her twin nervously.

" ' Stuart obliges,' Janesy."

" Goodness ! You haven't said that to me for ages, and it works just as it used to. It makes me feel as if I ought to carry a banner, and go galloping down-stairs on a milk-white steed." Jane was already across the room, sopping her eyes with cold water, and smoothing her hair.

Two minutes later when she went into the library, Stanley turned from the window without even a greeting, and began to talk very fast. " I just wanted to tell you," he said in a queer, repressed voice, " that, of course, I know what you're thinking about me, and I shan't blame you a bit if you let every one know what a coward I was. Only—if you wouldn't mind waiting until—until Molly gets over being so sick. You see she believes in

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me—and it would hurt her to know that—that she would have drowned if I'd been the only one."

"I don't want to tell. How can you think I'd be so perfectly horrid? And no one knows what he will do until the time comes." Jane's words poured forth in a sort of impetuous rage which made Stanley blink. Now that she had seen his utter misery she was angry with herself for having blamed him. "And—and after you got started you did everything—why, everything that any one could do."

"It's mighty good of you to try to make things easier for me," said poor Stanley, with a pathetic gratitude, very different from his customary self-satisfied air. "But I've always thought and—and said that I should be so brave, and now I know—I shouldn't."

"You don't know anything about it," Jane asserted almost snappishly. "You've got—why, you've got all the rest of your life to show Molly how much you think of her. And no one can tell her—this—because no one knows except—except, perhaps, Mr. Prescott."

"Oh, yes, he knows." There was a sudden light in the boy's gloomy eyes. "But he wouldn't have told, anyway. He talked it all out with me after we got Molly to the house. I guess—I guess I'm

Jane Stuart's Chum

going to be different now. 'I don't dare to say I am, though.'

"Nonsense! Of course you are," scolded Jane. Then with a great pretense of indignation, "I shall just have it in for you, Stanley Oliver, forever, because you were so sure I should tell. I want you to understand that girls have a sense of honor as well as boys."

Stanley actually smiled a little at her emphatic manner.

"You can just bet I shall believe it—after this," he responded fervently.

CHAPTER XVII

CAROL KEEPS A PROMISE

WHETHER, by some miracle, the shock of the icy plunge helped Molly to throw off the feverish cold which was making her ill no one could say. At any rate, contrary to all expectations, she was about the house again in a week, and so much more like her old cheerful self that her friends held glorification meetings over it.

Even to his severest critics, Stanley's state of almost pathetic meekness was appealing, and the Snowshoe boys, aided, perhaps, by certain apparently innocent suggestions from Mrs. Stuart, concluded that it was their part to stand by, and help on the good work.

"That was certainly an awful jolt for poor old Stan," remarked Ned, quite as if he had discovered the fact.

It was a stormy March afternoon, and Ned and Jack, having been up-stairs with David and Don, had stopped for a moment in the library to speak to Mrs. Stuart and Jane.

"I never saw such a change in any one," Jack said. "And he's just daffy over Mr. Prescott.

Jane Stuart's Chum

Seems to think there was never any one like him. I hope it'll last."

"Three weeks already ; I believe it will," said Mrs. Stuart, and then the conversation drifted to another subject, and presently the boys left.

"Mumsey," said Jane, going to sit on the arm of her mother's chair, "you know how I—how I disapprove of slang, don't you, but can you think of any word that could fit Stanley's case better than 'jolt'?"

"My dear," Mrs. Stuart's face was as solemn as her daughter's, "I do know how it hurts your feelings to use, or to hear a single word that can in any way be called slang, but I must agree with you that in this instance the word 'jolt' is effective." By this time Jane was giggling and mother laughed, too.

"Mother, I do love you when you're foolish like that. But really that awful shock has just shaken poor Stan out of all his old habits of thinking and talking." Jane knew that Stanley had made a clean breast of what he called his cowardice to her mother, and it was a relief to have some one to whom she could talk freely about it. "Molly says she didn't have any idea that she was skating anywhere except right around the edge of the pond that last time, but she hinted very strongly that she'd have been willing to go into the water for

Carol Keeps a Promise

the sake of this change in Stan. And I believe she would.

"I suppose, though, if I hadn't waved my skates at Mary when she was going into Mr. Prescott's house that afternoon everything might be—different," she ended with a little shudder. "You know Mr. Prescott came over because he was anxious."

Jane was silent for a few minutes, staring thoughtfully into the glowing fire, with her hand in mother's.

"I wish something—not dreadful like this, of course—would shake Carol into being nice to Mary, and jolt Mary's little mysterious ways out of her. I'm awfully fond of them both, but honestly, mother, I do get tired trying to divide myself up between them. Carol sputters if she thinks she's neglected, but Mary never says a thing. And they're freezingly polite when we three happen to be together. I'm at the same old subject, Don," she went on as her cousin came into the room. "When you like so many it's a perfectly dreadful problem to decide who's your real chum."

"Come on up-stairs and help me mount those last photographs," he coaxed. "I'll make an official investigation of your state of mind, and later on I'll present you with a picture of your

Jane Stuart's Chum

chum. I must have it somewhere, for I've had a shot at nearly every one in Belhaven since Christmas."

"Oh, pooh, you only say that to get me to fuss over those pictures with you. But don't look at me like that. I'll come."

"I'm looking at you like that because I have an idea," Donald said solemnly. "A real idea—no, I'm not going to tell you what it is until I have time to work it out. But what will you bet that I won't give you a photograph of—of said chum within—well, within two months?"

"Foolish! How can you when I don't know myself? You might just as well tell me your old idea now."

"It isn't an old idea. It's a perfectly good new idea—at least, to me. And I shan't give it away just yet. So there! But come on up. We're wasting time."

Donald turned toward the door only to be nearly run over by Kenneth who thrust a letter at him. "Mr. Chope brought it, and he thinks it's from Aunt Caroline, and would you please give me the stamp," he remarked all in one breath. "He said he felt it in his bone that it was a very important letter, and that something bad would happen to me if I dropped it in the mud on my way from the barn."

Carol Keeps a Promise

"Did he say which bone?" demanded David, who had closely followed his younger brother.

Kenneth stared blankly for an instant. Then, "It was his funny-bone, of course. That's the one Mr. Chope always feels things in," he answered, with such a satisfied assurance of having said exactly the right thing that Jane hugged him on the spot.

"It is from grandmother, and just listen to this," said Donald suddenly. "They're in Paris now, and she says :

" 'I told your grandfather this morning that I was tired of traveling and wanted to go home, and you should have seen his face. He began immediately to make plans about going into the woods this summer, and it made me feel that because he had been so nice about traveling with me I ought to do something for him.

" 'So I made up my mind—how is it you say it?—'right off the bat'—or the ball—or something of that kind—to go camping with him. Of course we shall be obliged to have a house, and I want a large, comfortable one, with plenty of chambers and bathrooms, not far from the railroad. We'll take all the Stuarts, and Jane may invite her best chum so that we shall have another girl.' "

Donald stopped to chuckle over Jane's suppressed groan, then went on :

Jane Stuart's Chum

“ ‘Of course, the minute I suggested my plan to your grandfather he began to make objections. Said he didn't believe I could find the kind of a house I wanted in any real camping-place, and that I'd probably be happier in a hotel. But obstacles never discourage me, and I'm bound that he shall have the kind of summer he wants.’ ”

“ That's all she says about that,” said Donald, suddenly catching Mrs. Stuart's eye and looking away again in a hurry. “ But here's a postscript.

“ ‘P. S. Your grandfather insists upon my saying that you're not to depend too much upon this, as I may alter my mind. Why he thinks I'm so changeable I never can understand. Anyway, I've set my heart on this.’ ”

“ ‘All the Stuarts—all the Stuarts’—that means me, too. Bully for Aunt Caroline! I'm going to tell Judy,” and Ken was off like a whirlwind.

“ Say, that's some plan,” observed David. “ Would you like it, little mother? ”

“ Yes, I think so,” Mrs. Stuart answered somewhat doubtfully. “ I believe I shouldn't plan too definitely about it, though, as Uncle Stephen says, for I'm sure Aunt Caroline's requirements as to a house would be hard to find. But then nothing seems to be impossible for Aunt Caroline,” she ended with a twinkle in her eye.

Carol Keeps a Promise

"Nice grandmother!" said Donald suddenly, tucking the letter in his pocket. "Isn't she lovely when she tries to be a real sport and use baseball language? I'm going up-stairs and write to her now. Shall I tell her we all think it's a great old plan?"

"Yes, for my part," agreed Jane. "But I see my finish trying to make up my mind which girl I shall invite."

"Let me decide for you," David coaxed.

"Oh, you! I know which one you would say. And perhaps I shall, too. Anyway, I'm not going to lose any sleep over it, because it isn't even April yet." Jane got up from her chair near the fire, and went over to the window where her twin was standing.

"Spinksy, doesn't this remind you of the way the rain poured down the day we first saw Carol?" she asked. "Wasn't she a little trump that day? Dear me, talking about her makes me want to see her this minute. Don't you think it's holding up a little?"

"Mrs. Janes, you're hoarse as a crow this minute. Mother wouldn't think of letting you go out."

"Don't I know it?" Jane laughed softly at her twin's worried face. "Anyway I think Carol is a trump," she said again after a little silence.

Jane Stuart's Chum

She and David were alone in the room now, and she was staring fixedly through the misty window upon the rain-swept landscape. "Look at the way she took that trick Rita Hastings and the other girls played on her. She never made any promises, or let us think that it was going to make any difference to her, but it has. It certainly has. I never think of not believing her now. Do you?"

"And I can't see," Jane went on, hardly waiting for David's slow shake of the head, "I can't see that she's a bit less fun, either. She just has to describe things entertainingly. She can't help it. You know Miss Ball thinks Carol's themes are quite remarkable for their—how is it she said it? Oh, something about her power of narration being so unusually well developed."

"Uh-huh. Carol's got that all right," agreed David, and then mother called Jane, and the little confab was over.

This year March blew itself lustily out of existence with no suggestion of the proverbial lamb, and, to prove the fickleness of the New England spring, April turned an unusually cold shoulder for two weeks, and then became suddenly and continuously warm, with thunder and lightning, instead of soft, awakening showers.

One afternoon toward the end of the month, Carol, going home after doing an errand for her

Carol Keeps a Promise

mother, saw Rita Hastings run out of her own house, stop suddenly as she reached the sidewalk, and begin to fumble agitatedly with her dress. Even from a little distance, Carol could see that she was arrayed in something very new and up to date, and as conspicuous as her dresses generally were.

Being too near to go another way without giving Rita the satisfaction of thinking she was avoided, Carol kept calmly on, wondering meanwhile why the girl should stamp her foot and look so excited. She meant to go by with just the indifferent nod she was in the habit of giving Rita, but something in the latter's expression of helpless distress made her slacken her pace and say hesitatingly, "What's the matter?"

"Can't you see?" sputtered Rita, holding up a part of her skirt and looking so appealing that the other girl ignored her sharp manner. "That goose of a dressmaker looped this up and didn't sew it strong enough. I forgot the skirt was so tight, and I stepped too far and ripped it all out, and now, oh, dear, I shall lose the train."

"You have twenty minutes before the two fifty-five," said Carol consulting her little watch. "Can't some one in the house fix it for you?"

"No one at home," snapped Rita, trying hard to keep back the tears, and only half succeeding.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"That is, just my grandmother and the maid, but they wouldn't have an idea how to do it. I might as well give up going. If I miss this train I can't meet my friends in the city, and that ends it."

Carol was glad afterward that she didn't spend more than one valuable moment making up her mind. "If you'll trust me," said confidently, "I can do it for you. At least I can fix it so that it will look all right for this afternoon."

"You!" Rita said incredulously. "Oh, would you really? You're a perfect angel. But there isn't time." She was leading the way into the house as she talked, with a queer, half-startled, wholly ashamed expression on her face.

"Don't stop to talk. Pins first, and a needle, and some silk as near that shade as you can find. And while you're getting them I want to use your telephone."

"There!" she triumphed, two minutes later. "I remembered that mother was going to send down to that train anyway, and I've told the chauffeur to stop for you. That'll give us time."

Rita watched with widening eyes while Carol draped and pinned and sewed with quick artistic fingers, and then stood back to judge the effect.

"It'll do," she said with a little sigh of relief. "It isn't perfect. Perhaps I could—no, there's the auto, and Thomas never has a minute to

Carol Keeps a Promise

spare.” She was pushing Rita toward the door as she talked, and the latter, half protesting, was trying to voice her thanks.

“Don’t stop to say a word,” Carol went on peremptorily, “and for goodness’ sake, take little steps or it’ll all be out again.” She hustled the other girl out of the house and into the machine. To her own surprise she even gave her a smile and a wave of the hand as the automobile glided away.

If any one had told her that she would be helping Rita Hastings out of a difficulty she wouldn’t have believed it, she was thinking as she started toward home again. “It’s just like me after I’ve snubbed her for four or five months to turn around and act as if I were her best friend. I really can’t be depended on—yet.”

She was crossing the street at this moment, and a sudden idea made her halt in the middle of it and stand there, perfectly still. So absorbed was she that she did not notice that an old man pulled up his horse with a sudden jerk, and was peering out of the carriage at her with a kindly, curious gaze.

How was she ever going to get even with Rita after this, she was asking herself sternly. She had vowed that she would, but one couldn’t, of course, get back at any one after doing her a favor. Well, anyway —

Jane Stuart's Chum

"P'raps you wouldn't mind movin' an inch or two one way or t'other," Mr. Chope suggested with his usual gentle courtesy. "Sally and me, we ain't used to takin' to the sidewalk jest here, but we'd do anything to oblige short of climbin' a barb-wire fence, or somethin' of that kind."

Carol looked a little startled. "I didn't know I was holding up the traffic," she said with a laugh, and then walked along to rub Sally's nose, an attention which that intelligent creature acknowledged by jerking her head high in air and shaking it vigorously.

"Mercy! I don't believe she likes me."

"Oh, sure she likes you. She wouldn't show such bad taste. She probably thought a fly lit on her," Mr. Chope responded amusedly. "Sally's eyesight ain't what it was, and it must be gittin' pretty bad when she can't tell a girl from an in-seck. I'm thinkin' 'bout gittin' glasses for her."

"Mr. Chope," Carol demanded with a sudden gravity that swept the dawning laughter from the old man's face, "Mr. Chope, suppose you didn't like any one, and that person didn't like you, and you were both—well, rather horrid to each other. Then suppose that the other person played a trick on you that made you feel perfectly unhappy—only, of course, you wouldn't let any one know about that"—Carol's voice trembled a little, and

Carol Keeps a Promise

the face of the listener assumed an expression of deep sympathy,—“and you felt as if you must get it back at her in some way. And then suppose you had a chance to do that person a favor and you did it, would you still think you could get even with her after that?”

“Well, now, if that ain’t one o’ them hypocritical questions sich as they have in court I miss my guess,” responded Mr. Chope, manifestly delighted with the judicial importance thrust upon him. “Now, let me see. On the first count, bein’ as you was both hateful, you stand ’bout even. On the second count, she clipped ahead o’ you—that is ef you reckon it bein’ ahead when you make another feller unhappy, which this court don’t. On the third count”—the old man paused for a long breath, and fixed his twinkling eyes on Carol’s downcast face—“on the third count, which, if I remember right, was doin’ the other party a favor, you scooted so far ahead of her that she’s goin’ to find it mighty diffikilt ever to git within hailin’ distance agin. When did it happen? I bet she ain’t got over hatin’ herself yit.”

“But—but I didn’t do it to make—to make her feel uncomfortable,” Carol responded, looking at him with a puzzled frown.

“Of course not. ’Twouldn’t hev worked if you had. And now, hevin’ set your pace, so to speak,

Jane Stuart's Chum

don't you let her kitch up to you." And Mr. Chope, realizing the value of stopping at the right moment, flicked Sally gently with his whip, and gave the reins an encouraging jerk.

"Good-bye. I'm bettin' on you," he called back with one of his cheeriest smiles, and Carol waved her hand with a sudden sense of comradeship.

For some reason an unwonted glow of satisfaction took possession of her as she walked on; a feeling which she attributed to the fact that something very tiresome was off her mind. It was suddenly quite clear to her that, with the passing of the months, her resentment against Rita and the other girls had grown less, and the keenness of her desire to get even had worn away. A hazy notion flitted through her mind that, perhaps, she had something for which to thank them. "Anyway I'm glad I did that for Rita," she assured herself, "and I hope she'll remember to take short steps. But—if her conscience pricks—I'm not the least bit sorry."

It was an exceedingly sultry day for April, and once in the house, Carol felt an unusual desire to stay there. She had promised Jane and some of the other girls to meet them at the little clubhouse, and, being almost fiercely determined to establish a reputation for dependability, she didn't dare to break her word. It would be a relief, she

Carol Keeps a Promise

was thinking, as she hurried through her lunch, if the time ever came when they wouldn't ask her over and over again whether she really meant to do what she had agreed. "Jane and David don't," she said to herself with a little throb of gratitude. "And I thank Jane by being a perfect wretch about Mary Brown." Her face grew very sober. "Dear me! It's dreadfully hard trying to reform a person, particularly when it's yourself," she thought with a sigh.

"I'm going over to the little house with some of the girls, Elise," she said to her mother's maid, as she finished trying on a summer dress which the girl was altering. "I don't want to disturb mother when she has the headache, so will you please tell her?"

"It looks like rain, Miss Carol. I'm afraid we're going to have another one of those dreadful showers."

"Oh, I guess not. Anyway, I shall get under shelter before it begins, and we shall be as safe there as anywhere."

Carol hesitated a moment on the door-steps. The sky was dark, but once or twice it had looked like this, and then had cleared again. One couldn't tell anything about the weather this spring. She wondered if it would be any use to telephone Serena or Polly, who were the only ones she could reach

Jane Stuart's Chum

in that way. Then it occurred to her that each one of the girls had spoken of having to do some errand before reaching the little house. "Probably they're all there by this time," she decided, "and I don't want to be the only one to back out."

As she approached the bayberry-candle house she had a momentary impulse to stop at the door and ask if Mary had gone, but she repressed it and hurried by without even a glance. "Of course she's over there by now, and, anyway, it might be too great a shock for her to have me do anything half-way decent." Deep in her heart there was a feeling of shame in connection with Mary Brown, though it was only in her moments of utmost candor that she confessed it, even to herself. She tried to think that the other girl disliked her, but she could not help knowing that two or three times Mary had tried in a shy sort of way to be friendly.

"My goodness, I'm going to be drenched as sure as the world!" she said aloud as she realized for the first time what progress the storm was making. She was almost at the little bridge, and she thanked her stars that it was no longer the unsteady log of former days. To her dismay there were frequent flashes of lightning, and the sullen muttering of the thunder was almost continuous. She had never been afraid before in a thunder-shower, but

Carol Keeps a Promise

now she found herself shaking nervously, and dreading the lightning.

At last she put her head down, and ran toward the house, stumbling now and then, and gasping for breath. It had never seemed so far away before. By some miracle the rain still held off, and she began to hope that she should get safely in the house before the first drops fell. She had supposed that she should find some one watching for her, and that the door would be flung open. Instead it remained tightly closed, and, to her surprise, the protecting shutters which the boys had thought necessary had not been opened.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she said nervously, fumbling for the door-key which she always wore around her neck, but before her searching hand realized the truth, she had a sudden vivid memory of taking off the key when she tried on her dress.

"Now I am in for it," she murmured, stunned into a degree of calmness by the awfulness of this discovery. And then she gave a stifled shriek as Larry, big and friendly, and manifestly uneasy, came bounding from somewhere, and huddled as close to her as he could get.

"Oh, Larry, Larry, you good old watchman! David told you to take care of the girls, didn't he?" she said, hugging the soft, tawny head, and not

Jane Stuart's Chum

complaining at being almost crowded out of the slight shelter the doorway afforded. "D-don't mind me," she went on whimsically, though her teeth were chattering from nervousness. "I—I believe you're as scared as I am. We might run for it, old fellow," and then, obeying a sudden impulse, she started off swiftly, calling the dog as she ran.

They had almost reached the little bridge before the first drops fell, but, by the time they had crossed, there was an army of drops, and then sheets of rain. Lightning tore the sky apart, and the terrific thunder seemed never to stop. All about them the trees swayed and cracked. Carol ran staggeringly, blinded by the rain, shrinking from the vivid lightning, vaguely comforted by the companionship of Larry.

Suddenly, through the mist, came another figure, flying toward her, and Carol, too dazed to feel surprise, saw that it was Mary Brown.

"I'm—I'm glad you've got so far as this. Come on," panted Mary, turning toward home again and taking Carol's arm strongly. Though she was streaming with rain, and buffeted by the wind, there was no fright in her voice or manner, and Carol felt at once soothed and protected.

"It was—was awful," she began piteously, and would have gone on gasping and chattering, but Mary stopped her.

Carol Keeps a Promise

“Don’t talk ! Run !” she said brusquely. “My house isn’t far.” And then she, also, saved her breath for the exertion she was making.

The fury of the storm had spent itself by the time they reached the house, and they, too, were spent, and fairly dragged themselves up the walk, under the dripping trees, with the dejected Larry closely following.

Long before Carol could in the least degree throw off her exhaustion, Mary was chattering, laughing, planning for the comfort of her guest ; an amazingly different girl from the one the Belhaven people had known.

“There’ll be a hot bath ready for you in two minutes, and you’re to put on some of my clothes and stay on this couch until you’re rested. And Brownie is getting something hot for us both to drink.”

Twenty minutes later Carol was leaning against a heap of cushions, sipping hot milk and trying to find the answer to certain questions which would pop into her mind. Why should Mary Brown, always so plainly dressed, be the owner of the delectable garments of lace and silk which she had so freely bestowed upon her guest ? Also, how had it happened that she had started for the little house when she must have known that the storm was inevitable ?

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Are you all warm and comfy?" demanded Mary, coming back into the room. "I'm going to have some milk now. Just the minute the rain stops, Fanny is going over to tell your mother where you are."

"How did you happen to—to go out in such a storm?" Carol asked in a small, tired voice.

"Why, I saw you go by. I knew none of the other girls had gone. And—and I fancied you might be very lonely and frightened over there all by yourself." The color came into Mary's cheeks. She was plainly embarrassed at having to tell of her own thoughtfulness.

"Do you mean—do you really mean that you went on my account, Mary Brown?" Carol sat up straight in her excitement, and the cup and saucer tilted so dangerously that the other girl laughed, and bent toward her.

"Oh, well, it wasn't actually raining when I started," she said, almost apologetically. "I thought perhaps I might get there before it began. There was something about it—the clouds, the feeling in the air—that made me want to get out and run," she ended with a dreamy look in her dark eyes.

"T-take this cup, ple-ease," said Carol abruptly. "I'm—I'm going to cry."

"What for?" demanded Mary, almost tipping



“YOU WENT ON MY ACCOUNT?”

Carol Keeps a Promise

over her own cup in the effort to save the other one. "Dear me, I'd rather it would rain water than milk."

Carol laughed instead of crying. Then, "Why did you care whether I was frightened when I've been such—such a miserable, hateful, wretched little beast about you?"

Mary looked at her in sudden, grave silence. "Will you please answer a question for me first?" she begged. "Why do you dislike me so much? Is it—is it because I'm poor, and—and not at all pretty, and rather—disagreeable?"

The enumeration of her defects was made with slow seriousness, and Carol's eyes opened wider with each item.

"Goodness, no," she answered with convincing bluntness. "Why should I care for any of those things—even if I thought them, which I didn't. All I was afraid of was that Jane Stuart would end by liking you better than she does me, and—I'm—a jealous little—cat. At least, I was, but I'm not any more. If she doesn't like you better, I'll—I'll pinch her."

"Oh, then everything's all right," said Mary in a relieved tone, smiling a little at Carol's absurdity. "Jane doesn't have to like me better, and she shan't be pinched. But I seem to need all the friends I can have. Perhaps—now—you and I—can like each other a little more."

Jane Stuart's Chum

There was a wistful appeal in the other girl's eyes, a certain charm in her manner which made Carol's impulsive affection leap forth in response. "Oh, Mary, come here on the couch as close as you can get without spoiling this gown. I—I want to hug you. I'm going to like you—hard. I can feel it coming and ——" she stopped suddenly at the sound of voices on the piazza. "There's Jane," she went on quickly. "Don't move. Let's stay as we are, and we'll give her the surprise of her life."

An instant later Jane, with her hair blown in wisps about her face, and her gray eyes very big and dark, knocked and entered almost at the same moment.

"Excuse me for walking right in. Miss Brown called me as I was going by. She's down on the piazza giving Larry the biggest bone you ever saw, and—for pity's sake, what has happened?"

There was an explosion of laughter from the other two girls, and Carol released Mary from the tight embrace in which she was holding her.

"Goodness! I thought you were never going to stop talking long enough to see the point," she said rubbing her forehead wildly. "And Mary's hair was tickling me so that I almost screamed. Lady Jane, I've reformed, and Mary and I are friends. And—and I'm not going to try to be

Carol Keeps a Promise

your realest chum, because I know it's Mary." Her gay voice faltered a little at the end, but she was smiling still.

"Not at all," said Mary promptly, looking so radiantly happy that Jane could hardly believe her eyes. "It's Carol, of course."

"Where do I come in?" Jane asked meekly. "If you both back out I shall be the chumless girl." She was looking dreamily at her two friends as they sat side by side on the couch, and wondering why she had never realized before that they resembled each other.

"Don't look at us any more in that squinty, artistic way, Lady Jane. It always makes me feel that my face is dirty, but it can't be to-day, after all that rain water."

"What under the sun made you go, Carol, when there was such a shower coming?" Jane questioned. "Mother wouldn't let me stir a step."

"My mother was asleep," admitted Carol. "And I didn't know how bad it was until after I started. But, even after I knew, I had to go." Carol tried her best to look very serious, and failed so utterly that the other girls giggled. "I had to prove, Jane Stuart, that I was ab-so-lutely the only girl in the crowd whose promise could be depended upon."

CHAPTER XVIII

WHO IS SYLVIA ?

It was Judy's idea originally, but it came from a poem which Susan Trot admired very much, and had copied with great care into a blank book. Judy admired it, also, and read it over and over until it stuck in her mind, and she could not forget it even if she had wished. At last she took to singing it to tunes of her own composition, and Jane declared that her young sister warbled even in her sleep:

“ May-baskets ! Tell me, Lovers, why are they
No more on knob or shining knocker hung ?
That sweetest custom of a simpler day
Has passed. Is then the world no longer young ? ”

It was about the first of April when Judy began singing it, and by the last week of that month each member of the family, willingly or unwillingly, had learned it, too. Jane found herself chanting it while she made her bed, and Donald, who really could sing, interspersed his photographic work with tuneful arias. Kenneth, feeding his hens, was heard to demand expressively, “ Is then the world no longer young ? ” while

Who is Sylvia ?

David hummed the words over and over, mostly on one note.

Jane, going into Judy's room a few days before the first of May, found her sister and Marcia Holt completely absorbed in the manufacture of tissue-paper flowers, more remarkable for their size and gorgeousness than for their likeness to nature.

"Hello, Marcia. What's happening?" she demanded in the friendly way that made all the younger girls adore her.

"May-baskets," explained Marcia, whereupon Jane groaned, and had to finish the poem in her mind before she could speak again.

"Judy Stuart," she said in an aggrieved tone, "if you ever learn a poem, and—and wish it on all the family again, I don't know what I shall do."

"I don't care if I did," Judy answered coolly. "It's a beautiful poem, and it gave me the idea of making May-baskets. And now"—her expression was distinctly one of triumph—"every one's doing it. You're all out of style if you don't."

"Goodness gracious! How fashionable we are. Who's making 'em besides you and Marcia?"

"We-ell, Miss Trot's making one for Hilda Prescott, and one for Miss Brown, because they've both been so good to her. And Ken's got two or three started, and ——"

"Any of my set?" interrupted Jane.

Jane Stuart's Chum

"Not that I know," Judy admitted with some reluctance. "Lots of the girls our age, aren't there, Marcia?"

"Uh-huh," responded Marcia, grouping colors with a lack of taste that set Jane's teeth on edge.

Out in the hall a few minutes later Jane found David monotonously announcing to the world, "That sweetest custom of a simpler day has passed."

"Oh, for pity's sake, I wish it had," cried Jane, and started to run down-stairs, but stopped half-way, seized by a new, and what she considered a brilliant, idea.

"Spinksy," she cried forcibly, "you know the flowers the High School pupils are going to give Miss Brown because she helped so much about the piano. Well, why don't we give 'em in a May-basket?"

Donald, coming out of his room, caught the last word, and went on melodiously, "Tell me, Lovers, why are they ——"

"If any one sings that thing again," began Jane fervently, "I shall have hysterics. Now listen, boys."

"Good idea," applauded David, when his twin had finished. "Come on, all of us, over to Rob's. He's chairman of the committee, and he's probably never thought about a ——"

Who is Sylvia?

“Sh!” said Jane, suppressing the last word with a forceful hand. “We’ll have to write it for him or we shall all burst into song. Come on.”

Jane’s idea proving highly acceptable, she and Carol, David and Rob were appointed a presentation committee, and left to carry out their own ideas as to details. There wasn’t much time before May-day, but, fortunately, the girls found a pretty basket at the “Nutshell,” and Jane gilded it. Carol, making a hurried trip to the city, happened upon a changeable ribbon shading wonderfully from lavender to gold, and with this tied in an airy bow, and the basket filled with purple hyacinths and yellow jonquils, there could have been nothing lovelier.

It was the early evening of the first day of May when the four conspirators left the Stuart house to hang the basket for “dear Miss Brown.” Jane had decreed that they should all wear dark clothes so that they might hide behind the trees near the house, and see how the fragrant gift was received.

The three others concealed themselves, and Rob hung the basket on the door-knob, and rapped loudly. Then he almost fell down the steps in his efforts to be quiet and go quickly to the tree he had selected. Jane, trying to stifle her own laughter, hushed Carol, who was giggling nervously over Rob’s gyrations.

Jane Stuart's Chum

Mary opened the door, but Miss Brown was close beside her, and talking breathlessly as usual.

"I'm sure I heard a knock—unless I dreamed it—I didn't know I was asleep, but I had just shut my eyes for a moment, and —— Oh, my dear, what is that wonderful fragrance, and where does it come from?"

As the door opened, disclosing no one, the old lady in her surprise had walked directly past the basket, and was out on the piazza, peering into the darkness.

"Come in; it's another May-basket, Brownie. Only this time the flowers are real," said Mary excitedly. "Here's a card." They were standing under the light in the hall, and Jane could see that, for the first time since she had known her, Mary was wearing a white dress, and looking very girlish and even pretty. At almost the same instant she realized that Miss Brown had on the purple satin gown in which she had first seen her.

"To dear Miss Brown, who has helped to give our school one of its greatest treasures, from the pupils of the Belhaven High School," read Mary, and then she gazed at the old lady with the queer little smile which made her look, as Rob said afterward, like a mischievous child.

To the horror of the concealed watchers, Miss Brown suddenly burst into tears.

Who is Sylvia?

"Oh—oh, I can't—stand it any longer," she sobbed, clutching wildly for a handkerchief. "Dear me! I shall spot this gown if I cry on it. Oh, here's my handkerchief—but I can't stop to cry. I'm going straight over to see Mrs. Stuart—and Jane—and all of them. You mustn't hinder me." She was dabbing her eyes with one hand, and trying to pick up the shining folds of her gown with the other. Her manner was a strange mixture of pleading and determination.

"You will let me off from my promise, won't you, dear?" she went on imploringly.

"Yes, Brownie, I will." Mary soothed her with little pats and cuddlings, and, at her answer, the old lady was quite herself again, and started toward the piazza.

"Oh, wait," Mary expostulated. "You can't go in that dress, can you? And—and, Brownie, I couldn't possibly go with you. I—I couldn't bear it to be there while you tell them." Mary was nervously clutching the old lady's shoulders, and Jane could see distinctly that she looked as though she were ready to cry.

"There, there, don't you worry one mite." Miss Brown gently freed herself, and gave Mary a hug. "Of course you don't need to go, and I can turn up my gown. I'll run in and get a shawl."

They both stepped out of sight, and in that

Jane Stuart's Chum

brief moment the four onlookers fled as if by a concerted movement. Neither of them spoke or stopped until they had nearly reached the Stuart house. Then Jane halted, and issued directions in a whisper, though no one was within ear-shot.

"Carol and I can go the rest of the way alone, and you boys go back and meet Miss Brown—just accidentally, you know, and bring her over."

A quarter of an hour later when Miss Brown, chatting excitedly to the boys, arrived in the library, Mrs. Stuart was reading aloud to her own children, Carol and Donald. It was warm for a May evening, but the window opening on the piazza gave entrance to a soft air full of the promise of spring.

"Mrs. Stuart and Jane—and all of you," began Miss Brown, hardly waiting for a more formal greeting, "I've come to tell you something, and I'm glad there's so many here. I just can't stand it a minute longer to have you all think that—that I'm the one who's been giving this money for the piano, and the Christmas tree, and some other things. Instead—it's Mary. And it ain't Mary either, because her name's Sylvia Mary Browning. But being so, she had a right to Mary Brown, of course."

The old lady paused to get her breath, and Jane, glancing at her mother, saw a puzzled ex-

Who is Sylvia?

pression flit over her face at mention of Mary's real name.

"Now if you'll just let me say it my own way," Miss Brown went on apologetically, "I want to begin right at the beginning, and tell the whole thing. You see it was last June that I saw her first when she was lying in bed in the sanitorium, next door to my little house, and looking like a poor little white ghost of a girl. I knew something about her; that there'd been an awful fire in the hotel where she and her aunt and uncle and cousin had been staying, and she and a maid they had was the only ones of the party saved."

Miss Brown looked about her as if appealing for sympathy. There was a pretty color in her cheeks, and her blue eyes shone.

"Probably you read about it in the newspapers," she said to Mrs. Stuart, and, to Jane's surprise, mother nodded in assent.

"I remember," she said. "There were pictures in the paper, and this cousin was described as a very beautiful, talented girl who had a brilliant future."

Miss Brown's face grew very sober. "P'raps she had," she responded almost curtly, "and then again p'raps she hadn't. At any rate, those relatives hadn't done right, because they'd had the care of Sylvia Browning ever since she was a tiny

Jane Stuart's Chum

baby, and they'd used most of the income of the money her father had left her"—Miss Brown stopped to take a long breath, and then repeated impressively—"most of the income of her money on themselves and their daughter. And they hadn't troubled themselves to give Sylvia advantages, nor let her know many people, and she, poor little thing, never dreamed the money was hers."

Jane, watching Miss Brown with fascinated gaze, got up softly and took a chair a little nearer to her. As she passed the open window she heard a step on the piazza, and looked out to see Mr. Chope's wrinkled face gazing interestedly at the absorbed group.

"After they got her out of the hotel," continued the old lady, perfectly unmindful of everything around her, "she was sick, and unconscious, and delirious, and I don't know what all, till finally she come to herself one day, too weak to speak or move, and she heard folks talking about her. She told me this part, herself, after I'd known her some time, and I thought it would kill her just to tell it.

"It was their maid talking to the nurse and she was taking on about Sylvia's cousin, and saying that she was so beautiful, and that everybody loved her. And that no one liked Sylvia because she was homely and had a bad disposition, and

Who is Sylvia?

that no one would ever care for her except on account of her money. It seems she'd found out long before that about the money, but she never told because she liked the other girl better. And there that poor child had to lie and hear all that."

"Oh, the poor, poor thing," said Carol, with the quick tears springing into her eyes.

"After that there was a guardeen appointed for her," Miss Brown went on, "and they took her to the sanitorium. She was afraid of everybody, and 'twas perfectly pitiful to see how she hated the idea of having the money. And somehow she kinder trusted me, and after a while we made it up between us that I should go somewhere near the ocean with her, and should pretend it was my money, and she'd be just plain Mary Brown until folks could forget all about Sylvia Browning."

"That was why she was frightened by the bonfire," said Jane, as Miss Brown was silent for a moment. "And now I understand why she had the shades down when I first went there, and why she was afraid to meet other people. Oh, poor Mary—I mean Sylvia. I'm afraid I never can get used to calling her that, and it's one of my favorite names."

"She began to get happier from that first day you came to see her," Miss Brown said joyously. "And then the others were nice to her, but she

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wasn't wholly satisfied until the other day when Carol ——"

"Oh, please don't say any more," begged Carol, burying her face on Mrs. Stuart's shoulder, and murmuring in muffled tones something about "selfish beast."

"I'm going over to get her. May I, Cousin Elizabeth?" asked Don, starting for the door with his boyish face full of feeling. "The poor little thing—over there alone—waiting for us to hear about this."

"Let's all go," began Jane, and then with a quick change of mind, "let's not. Hurry, Don, please. I'm wild to see her." For some reason, she was sure that Donald, with his knowledge of loneliness and sorrow, was the one of them all to put Sylvia at her ease. It troubled her a little because Rob slipped out of the room, too, apparently in pursuit of Donald.

"She had on a white dress, mother," Jane went on, "and she looked so pretty in it."

"It's my birthday," Miss Brown explained shyly, "and we was celebrating a little. She gave me this dress last summer, because she'd heard me say I'd always wanted a purple satin, but I never could persuade her to wear anything pretty herself. Those clothes you had on," she added, turning to Carol, "was bought for her when she was sick, but she'd never had 'em on."

Who is Sylvia?

Mrs. Stuart started to speak, but the quick opening of the front door made her pause.

"I found her starting all by herself," said Don, ushering Sylvia Browning into the room with an air of triumph.

"I—somehow—felt sure you would let me come," said Sylvia herself, with a little wistful smile, "even if I have been pretending to be some one else ever since you've known me."

Jane was across the room in a second with her arm around the newcomer, and Carol was just behind her.

"I love your name," chattered Jane, trying to bridge over a trying moment, and punctuating her remarks with a squeeze or two. "It seems so much more like you than 'Mary Brown' ever did. Not that Brown isn't a nice name, of course," she went on, feeling that she was getting into deep waters.

"It's a very nice name to me—one of the nicest in the world." Sylvia turned an affectionate glance toward the pink-cheeked old lady. "I know Brownie hasn't told you that she has been a perfect darling to me, and that I was nervous and cross and—and generally disagreeable for a long, long time. I just made life miserable for her."

"I must go home," declared Miss Brown, rising suddenly, and trying to conceal the fact that her eyes were full of sudden tears. "Don't you hurry,

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Sylvia. Some of the young folks can bring you home. I'm so afraid Fanny has let the kitten run out that I think I'd better go."

David started up to go with her, but Mr. Chope, head and shoulders into the room by this time, interposed with his customary gallantry.

"Don't you trouble 'bout leavin' the house, Davy. I was jest thinkin' of takin' a stroll in that direction myself, an' if Miss Brown will let me I'll see she gits home." And then, at Miss Brown's blushing assent, he added in a voice which reached only David's ears, "You see there was one or two pints along the first of that story I missed."

"Say, Jane," said Donald suddenly, when they had all settled down again, his cousin on the sofa between the two other girls, "didn't I tell you I'd show you a picture of your chum? Well, it came to-night, and here it is." He passed a square envelope to her as he ended, and she opened it, feeling a little nervous over the mention of this much discussed question.

"It's Ma—Sylvia," cried Carol, peeking over Jane's shoulder.

"No, it's Carol," asserted Sylvia. "My hair isn't wavy."

"Oh, oh, it's both of you," Jane said, looking up at her cousin with shining eyes. "It's what we were talking about, isn't it, Don? Only you

Who is Sylvia?

never let me know you meant anything like this. It's a composite photograph of you both, and—and you look so much alike it might do for either."

The face looking out of the picture was merrier than Sylvia's and more sober than Carol's. The cloudy dark hair might have done for either, but Carol could not claim the earnestness of the eyes, and Sylvia's lips were less ready to smile.

"Oh, my lovely chum!" Jane said in a tone of heartfelt satisfaction. "Don, you're a genius. Here she is, mumsey," she was giving the picture to David to be passed to her mother, "and here she are." She threw an arm around each of the girls and hugged them tightly.

"I'd like a group of that," said Donald, regarding the golden head between the two dark ones with a critical gaze.

"Take one, and send us to Aunt Caroline," cried Jane with sudden inspiration. "Tell her it—it are my chum, and that I can't possibly go camping this summer without—without both of it."

"Oh, she'll let you have the whole thing. I know grandmother," answered Donald, with a proud and easy confidence that delighted Mrs. Stuart. "It wouldn't do to have only half a chum with you."

Every one laughed, and in the midst of the fun Rob dashed into the room, and with a word to

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Mrs. Stuart opened both windows wide. As if it had been a signal to some one, there floated in from outside the sound of a mellow voice singing the lovely old song :

“ Who is Sylvia ? What is she ?
That all our swains commend her ? ”

The words came out with great distinctness, though tinged with the slight foreign accent, which to those who knew the singer made it all the more dear and delightful.

“ It's Mr. Prescott,” cried Jane, flying to the window. “ And the Ninepin girls—and the Snowshoe boys—and Hilda. Did you ever hear anything fit in so beautifully as that song ? ” she ended with an ecstatic sigh.

There was a little silence after the last note of the song died away, and then the girls and boys sang a serenade Mr. Prescott had taught them.

“ It was pretty smart of you, Rob, to get them together in such a short time,” Carol said.

“ I was waiting for some one to notice that,” remarked Rob calmly. “ I really have them under perfect control. I told them Sylvia Browning had arrived, and they were to come and serenade her without asking any questions. No one knows yet who she is except the Prescotts.”

“ Have them all come in,” said Mrs. Stuart, to

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the great joy of every one. "And, Rob, please go home and see if you can borrow some lemons. Ask Hilda and Molly to come into the kitchen and help me. Jane, you must do the honors here."

It was quite like a real reception, as Jane said afterward, with Sylvia, in her pretty white dress, having to be introduced to every one, and looking as if she loved it all and couldn't get enough of it. And mother, like the general she was, conjured up refreshments enough to go around, though she confessed she couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for the neighbors.

"Nothing in it for enchanted princesses now, is there?" Rob said softly to Jane, when every one was going, and he came to say good-night. "The real thing is good enough for me."

"I should say it was," answered Jane, with a last wave of the hand at Sylvia and Carol, who were going out of the door together.

"I'm too happy for words," Jane remarked, when the last one had departed, and mother and the rest lingered in the hall for a moment before going up-stairs. "Now that I don't have to decide between Carol and Sylvia I haven't a trouble in the world."

David, looking at her with mischief in his gaze, was moved to sudden mirth. "You're too self-satisfied," he said maliciously. "I'm going to

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spoil it." And then he began deliberately, "May-baskets! Tell me, Lovers ——"

"Wretch!" groaned Jane. "I might have known some one would do that." Then, with a quick return to her former mood, she cried delightedly, "Why, Spinksy, I'm glad you reminded me. I love that little poem now, and I must apologize to Judy in the morning. If it hadn't been for her, I shouldn't have thought of that way to give Miss Brown the flowers. And Miss Brown wouldn't have got desperate, and I might have had to wait for days"—Jane's emphasis made it sound like years—"to know about Sylvia. So please, kind brother, sing it all you like, only, Spinksy"—Jane paused for an instant and gazed at him imploringly—"if you want your family to love you, get a few more notes in your—in your vocabulary."

David chuckled. "You've got the last word as usual, Mrs. Janes," he said with sleepy good-nature. "Come on, Don. I'm going to bed."

"Where's the picture of my beloved chum?" Jane demanded, going into the library to hunt for it while mother waited at the foot of the stairs. "Isn't she a dear?" she said, coming back with the photograph in her hand. "I want to put her on my table and look at her the first thing in the morning."

Who is Sylvia ?

Both heads bent over the pretty girlish face for a moment, then Jane said with conviction in her voice, "Mumsey, perhaps it's horrid of me, but I'm quite sure I never can settle down and like one girl better than all the others. Isn't it the grandest thing ever that I can have a composite chum ?"

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